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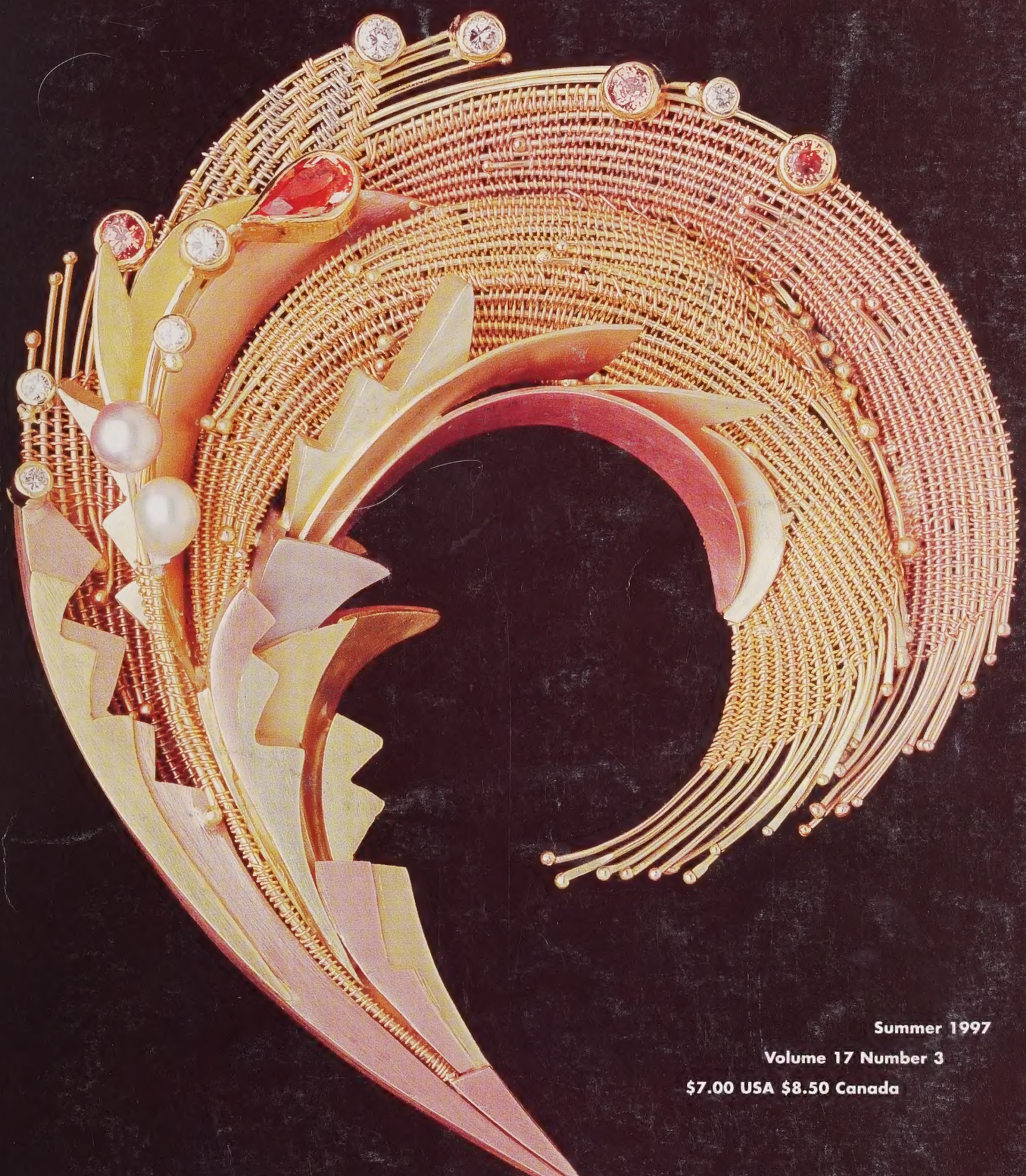

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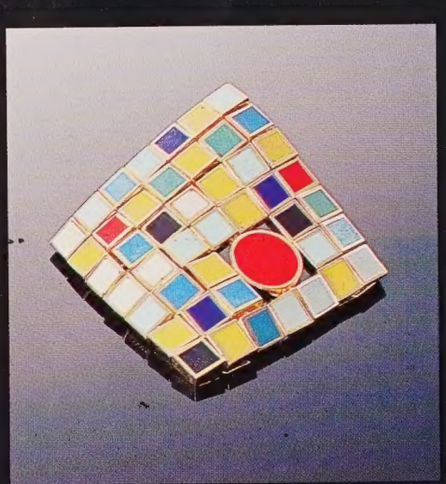

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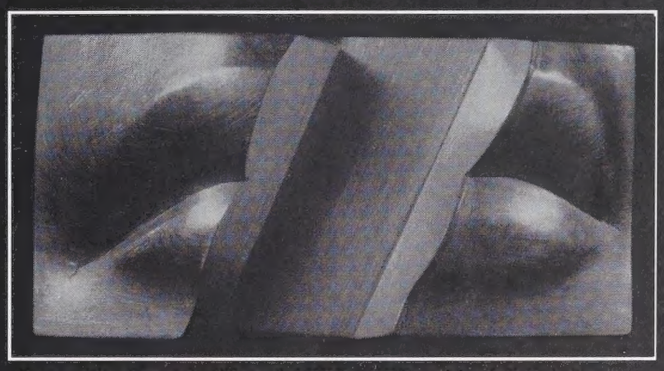

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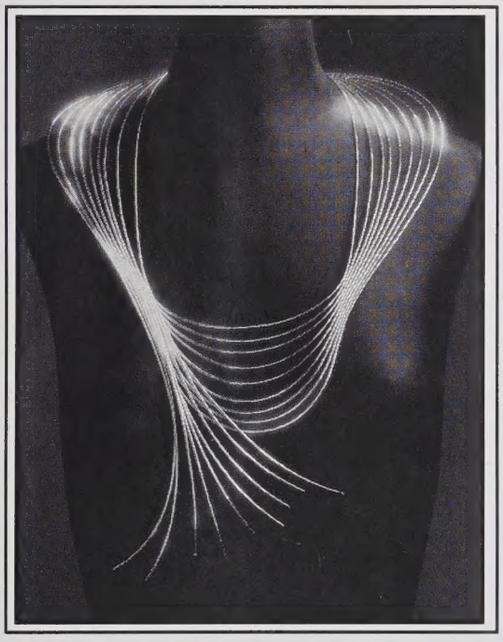

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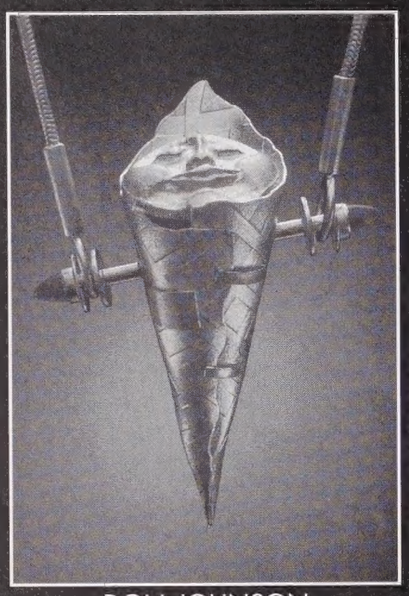

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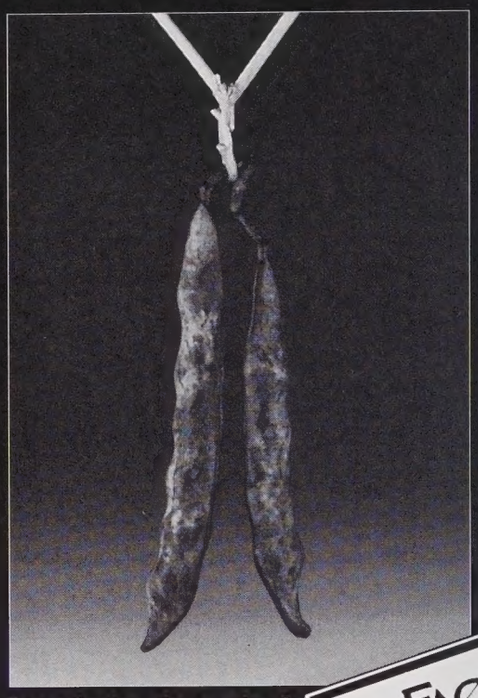

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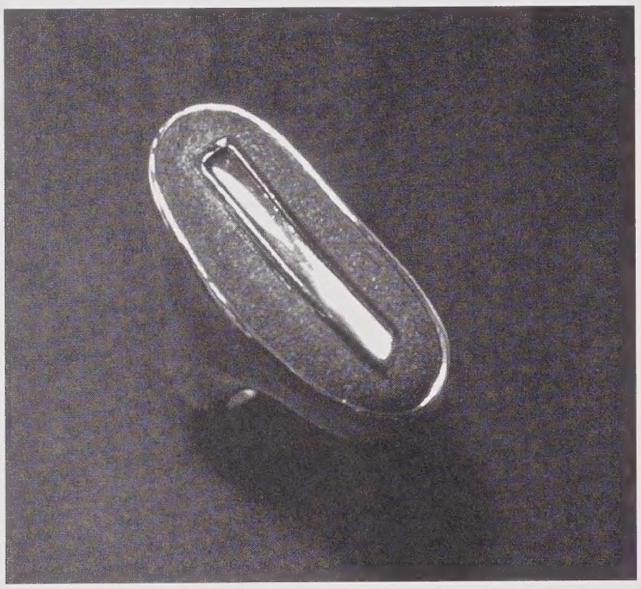

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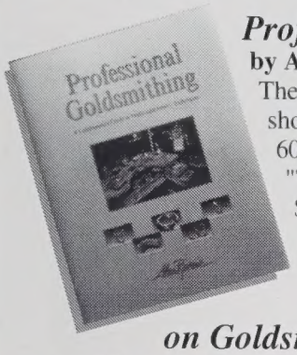

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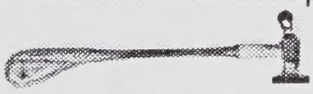

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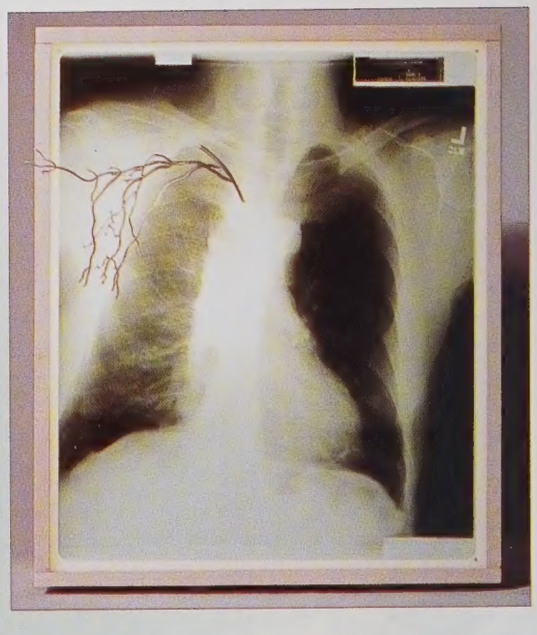

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3½ x 3"
Photograph by James Beards
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Frank C. Lewis, Editor
Metalsmith
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Editorial

A music critic in the *New York Times* recently posed the question: "can we separate beauty like this from the ethics involved?" While not addressing metalwork or jewelry specifically, the question nevertheless resonated with me particularly in regard to my role as both an editor and a teacher in the arts.

As much as I simply *experience* works of art and craft, my interest in why human beings make such things inevitably raises questions regarding the status and role of works of art in our culture. Historically, art and craft have been associated with the exercise and manifestation of power. The most simple childish scrawl is an exercise of power, power over materials, the environment, or the willed agency over the motions of the human body. Even the body adornment of many non-western cultures, created from found objects and detritus, embodied spiritual and natural power; powers which were a part of a complex societal system which carefully controlled the exercise of that power through Shamans, Priestesses, and Healers. And, while less nuministic, western adornment, too, was a part of a complex and exclusive hierarchy of precious materials and the carefully enscripted and coded language of aesthetics and acceptable craft practices. In fact, it can be shown fairly conclusively that before a human being can find beauty in a landscape, a face, or any other *naturally* occurring form, that form has always/already been encoded with a biological and/or cultural value.

Thus, it seems to me, that works of art are much more problematic when we don't consider the ethics and ramifications of production. To ignore the cultural, historical, and political conditions of a work of art or craft is to give away our power and autonomy as viewers to someone who is more than willing to assert control over us, even if that control is manifested only in the most simple of ways.

Personally I find the operations of history and power in a work of art both intellectually and sensually satisfying. Understanding how a particular form operates as ideology satisfies both my brain and my senses. I come to a much greater appreciation and awareness of the form when I am also challenging myself to see how and why it has come to symbolize a particular historical/cultural concept of beauty.

To employ a crude analogy: Though I fancy myself an aficionado of fine food, and though members of my family consider me a *gourmet* cook, I occasionally enjoy recreating some of my Grandma's simple, unhealthy, heavy, grease-laden, provincial, economically poor, southern cooking. (Though from a purely philosophical position I have yet to recreate any of her jello salads.). And while I can enjoy both extremes of taste, it is also undeniable that both food groups carry with them quite clear associations with culinary challenge, elegance, sophistication, urbanity, comfort, warmth, and nostalgia, among others. Does the food still taste good? Yes. Can I ignore the labor, the cost, the almost atavistic memory concomitant with certain flavors? No. And occasionally my dinner companions even comment on how my sharing of these things during the meal enhance their own enjoyment of the food, just as my meal is as often enhanced by their sharing and discussion of both the enjoyment of flavors and the associative meanings of the food. I suspect that I would feel a significant degree of loss if I only took a meal exclusively for either nourishment or flavor alone. And from the looks of most fast food advertising on television the individuals who are trying to secure our business are equally interested in supplying a meaning to our dining experience with their appeal to family values, safe havens, and nostalgic memories of our first trademarked burger.

Thus I am often confused by those who argue against a wider, more encompassing cultural, social, historical, economic, and psychological approach to works of jewelry. As a magazine of both pictures and words, and as a magazine of record, *Metalsmith* would be doing only half of its job if it simply celebrated the undeniable beauty of our field.

FCL

Note
The obituary which appeared in Spring 1997 *Metalsmith* was a fax received in the editorial offices of the magazine from Helen Drutt English and was not intended by the author to be published as an obituary.

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Recent Sightings

Bruce Metcalf

A Clarification

The column I wrote for the Winter 1997 *Metalsmith*, titled "A New Golden Age," has stimulated more response than any other I have written. Most of the positive responses were delivered in person; most of the negative responses appeared on the ACMET-L Internet site. The nastiest of the negative responses started out, "This is BM we're reading. (a sibling of BS)." Gee... it seems I exposed a nerve.

What struck me the most about both kinds of response, good and bad, is that few people appeared to have actually paid attention to what I wrote. Some people congratulated me as if I were a defender of handwork against that mean Mr. Lechtzin, and some chastised me as an enemy of current technologies. Neither view is correct. I feel compelled to clarify things a bit.

First, the column was NOT about computer technology. In fact, I'm quite interested in how computer technology is applied to craft production, and I have talked at length with some of the people who are trying to put these new techniques into practice. From Al Paley's laser-cut production candlesticks, to Peter Handler's cast aluminum chair legs designed with a CAD program, to computer-controlled weaving and knitting, I'm interested in it all. As I indicated in the column, computer-based technologies are very useful. The computer is probably the most flexible of all the new tools to arrive on the crafts scene in this century and new applications will appear for some time to come. So, the people who thought I was attacking the computer-based technologies were flat-out wrong. Hand production and computer-aided production will probably co-exist for as long as we have electricity.

However, the column was about the RHETORIC applied to computer technologies in the crafts. It was not about scientific truth, or about the way computers are used. The column was about the ideologies that computer technologies come wrapped in. I used Margaret Yaukey's and Stanley Lechtzin's own words to point out some of the problems inherent in their thinking. Curiously, not one of the negative responses that I saw addressed the quotations that I cited: it was as if the truth of these quotations were self-evident, and needed no further comment.

But, will computer-aided technologies *really* generate "another ... Golden Age in the Craft/Art community," as Yaukey says? Is handwork *really* "somewhat onerous, something to be avoided by intelligent people," as Lechtzin claims it is? Is it *true* that "direct contact with materials" will be eliminated from the art process, as Lechtzin foresees? These are the assertions that I challenged in the column. If somebody wishes to question my writing, they must defend these assertions. Obviously, I found all three claims rather dubious.

Why do I take such statements seriously? Because rhetoric becomes ideology, and ideology can be astonishingly powerful. In my studies of the history of modern craft it is clear to me that certain arguments advanced for the continuation of craft practice, especially those of John Ruskin and William Morris, changed the course of history. Some continue to resonate to this very day. The arguments advanced by Walter Gropius, Bernard Leach, Soetsu Yanagi, and many others are also highly influential.

Ideologies about craft and handwork are not always positive. Arguments against the relevance of craft practice are being used to shut down programs and change the content of craft courses all over North America. I recently visited the Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary, and was told that the dean of the visual arts department constantly asserts that the teaching of technique has no place in a "Post-modern institution." She claims that craft courses should be taught just like the sculpture courses: all about content, and little or nothing about technique. It doesn't take too much imagination to realize that such a restructuring could result in the death of craft education at ACAD, and its absorption into the sculpture program. This is the kind of negative effect that rhetoric can have in the real-world.

So, Stanley Lechtzin asserts that handwork is somewhat onerous, and that it will die out as a part of craft and art practice. To what uses could this rhetoric be put: to defend computer-aided technology from its detractors? Yes ... but why do computer enthusiasts have to wrap their defenses with unsupportable predictions about the future? Why can't they just focus on the things that computers already do? And why do prophesies like Lechtzin's have to be predicated on making something else obsolete? Especially when that something is hand labor, which I believe (for very good reasons) to be basic to the understanding and practice of craft?

The sad fact is that Lechtzin's rhetoric plays directly into the hands of arts administrators who have no respect for craft, and would be happy to see it disappear. Lechtzin's argument could be deployed to justify closing any jewelry program in North America. Many arts bureaucrats would be happy to clear out all that jewelry equipment, and give the space to a program that generates more cash, like graphic design. This is especially ironic, because Lechtzin has challenged the academic community to justify the continuing existence of jewelry and metalsmithing programs against exactly this kind of threat. His words could easily be used against his own purposes.

Of course, I have to admit the possibility that Lechtzin has changed his mind since 1988, when the interview appeared. But the quotation I used is part of the public record: it stands as Lechtzin's position. Having seen him speak less than three years ago, I think he still believes the same things. If not, he can write a letter to the Editor, and set the record straight.

Anyway, I repeat: rhetoric can be powerful stuff. It can be dangerous, and it should be deployed with great care. I also believe that bad rhetoric should be challenged by those whose interests it might damage. Then we, as a community, can weigh the relative merits of opposing positions, and perhaps come to a collective conclusion. Lastly, this process of sorting through ideas can be done dispassionately, without anger and name-calling. Please.

Bruce Metcalf is a jeweler and writer living in Philadelphia.

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BABS Galaro
Prince Caffeinetta, 1995
silver, silver plate, 14k plate, rhinestones
5½ x 3½ x 3¾"

The Pleasures of Excess

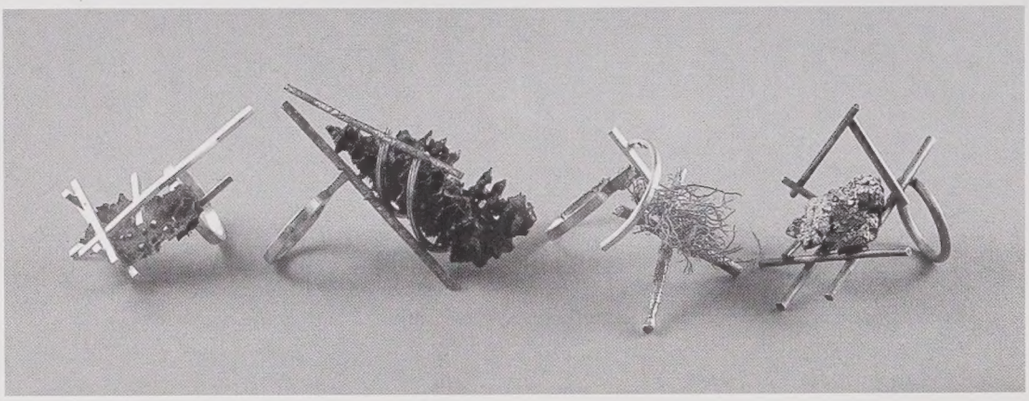
Text by
Frank C. Lewis

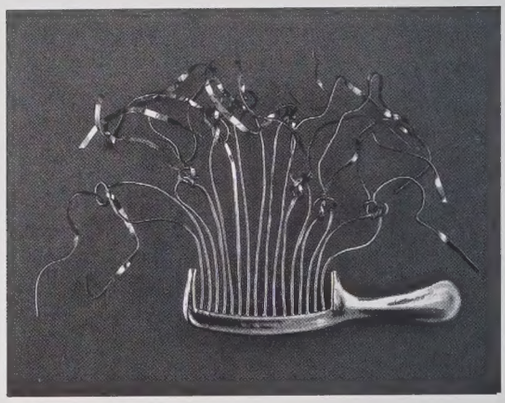
Contemporary American culture has a conflicted, schizophrenic relationship to excess. On one hand indulgence crosses economic boundaries: from the lawn elves, plastic flamingos, and bathtub virgins of trailer parks and cheap track housing to the brocades, snuff boxes, and Louis Quatorze armoires of Long Island mansions; an acceptance of and indulgence in excess is pushed to the perimeters, the extremes of economic status. On the other hand, a vocal segment of the middle class, including the vast majority of artists, critics, academics, and professionals, espouse the restraint of modernism, a *tasteful*, spare cleanliness of design and form. It could be argued that this visual austerity is a product of some internalized sumptuary laws: an enforced leveling of the citizenry's economic ostentation and a leftover from our puritanical past; or that it is simply a reasonable pragmatism and fiduciary restraint. Does the desire for such a simplicity of environment reflect an accurate picture of our understanding of the world or does it mask our anxious fear that the world is in fact a confused, paradoxical, messy, congestion of meanings and meaninglessness?

One of my first encounters with the aesthetics of superfluity was on seeing the Italian artist Benvenuto Cellini's *Salt Cellar for Francis 1st*, 1539 – 43. My eyes, developed in the austerity of whitewashed Protestant churches and educated in the values of the Bauhaus and high Modernism, recoiled at that conceit of gold, jewels, and iconography. Such a abomination, so I thought, could only be the product of an anxiety fueled by expensive materials, conflicting iconographies, and an excessive ego; as if Cellini indiscriminately confronting each and every one of the conflicted verities of his time, from skillful mastery to programmatic indulgence to the infinite availability of the fruits of high mercantilism, was unable to focus, struck with a kind of visual glossolalia. My sophisticatedly arch professor, trained in the academy of high Modernism, dismissed with mocking tones Cellini's mannerist indulgence, assuring the class that for any of us to enter the realm of serious intellectual discourse in the arts, we must equally pursue to root out the mannered, the baroque, the rococo, and the Victorian. And such seems to be the education of most of my peers.

Yet, increasingly a number of contemporary artists have embraced the pleasure and aesthetics of excess. Particularly in the field of metals, visual and material complexity, once dismissed as the domain of costume jewelry and Tiffany's, have recently been offered as a complex and intelligent strategy; a strategy that functions as both a transgression and repudiation of the hegemony of Modernism,[1] and as an alternative, though equally viable, artistic practice. Other artists have conjoined multiple forms and materials in a single object in order to create a kind of visual symphony, to encourage and promote visual, and at times even aural and tactile, complexity as a way to sustain and prolong the viewer/wearer's engagement with a piece. Within these sometimes overlapping operations excess is almost always posited as a counter or antithesis to restraint, propriety, established boundaries, and the notion of moderation.

Judith Kaufman
Pin





While the various strategies of production are as numerable as the artists which engage them, there seems to be some general categories of practice which deserve an overview. The following is an attempt to develop a critical framework within which to assess and consider a significant and growing body of contemporary metals in which the aesthetics of excess are operative.

Because she combines the tradition of reliquaries with homages to individuals in her life, it might be expected that BABS Galaro finds the aesthetics of excess an efficacious strategy. In its insistence on simplification and purity, modernist design seldom allows for complexity, contingency, and the profusion of memories, fragments, and experiences which help us construct our present selves. The multipurpose functions of religious reliquaries as containers, liturgical implements, monstrances, icons, and fetishes, among others, demands a formally complex, iconographically loaded form. Galaro additionally references both a history of metalsmithing techniques and her own training and production practices in her curious and almost medieval *Prince Caffeinetta*. And while it is arguable that highly personal work does not *ipso facto* have to engage more, rather than less, as an operative strategy, many metalsmiths including Galaro certainly find that excess lends itself more fully and more richly to the dense, quirky, private, and associative operations of consciousness.

Though some may argue that narrative is in itself antithetical to the high modern style, (particularly narrative in 2D and 3D works of art and craft)[2] traditional narratives share an order and development that can find a comfortable site within the operative strategies of modernism. The conventions of the classical narrative: a heroic [male] individual who progresses logically through time and space, solving riddles and moving closer to success, realization, kingship, recognition, etceteras has informed modernist art. While a linear progression of unfolding time is generally considered absent in a static object such as jewelry, narrative is nevertheless enacted as viewers seek to identify the materials, iconographical elements, and emblems in a work; and then process this information into the *meaning* of the piece.

The modernist artist seeks to blaze a clear path for the viewer to reach resolution. In that case excess, anything that is extraneous to progress or any thing that confuses the fixity and absoluteness of that meaning, is viewed as disruptive. A John Iversen or a Donald Friedlich brooch distills the potentialities of interpretations to a few possible, *reasonable* responses. Thus narrative work can exist comfortably within the modernist prescriptions which demand balance, restraint, and propriety. But within certain recent narrative works visual clarity and material homogeneity is often sacrificed for the sake of an irresolvable dilemma. Such works present a conscious and intended confusion. They resist offering closure or resolution, problematizing the viewer's response to the pieces and demanding

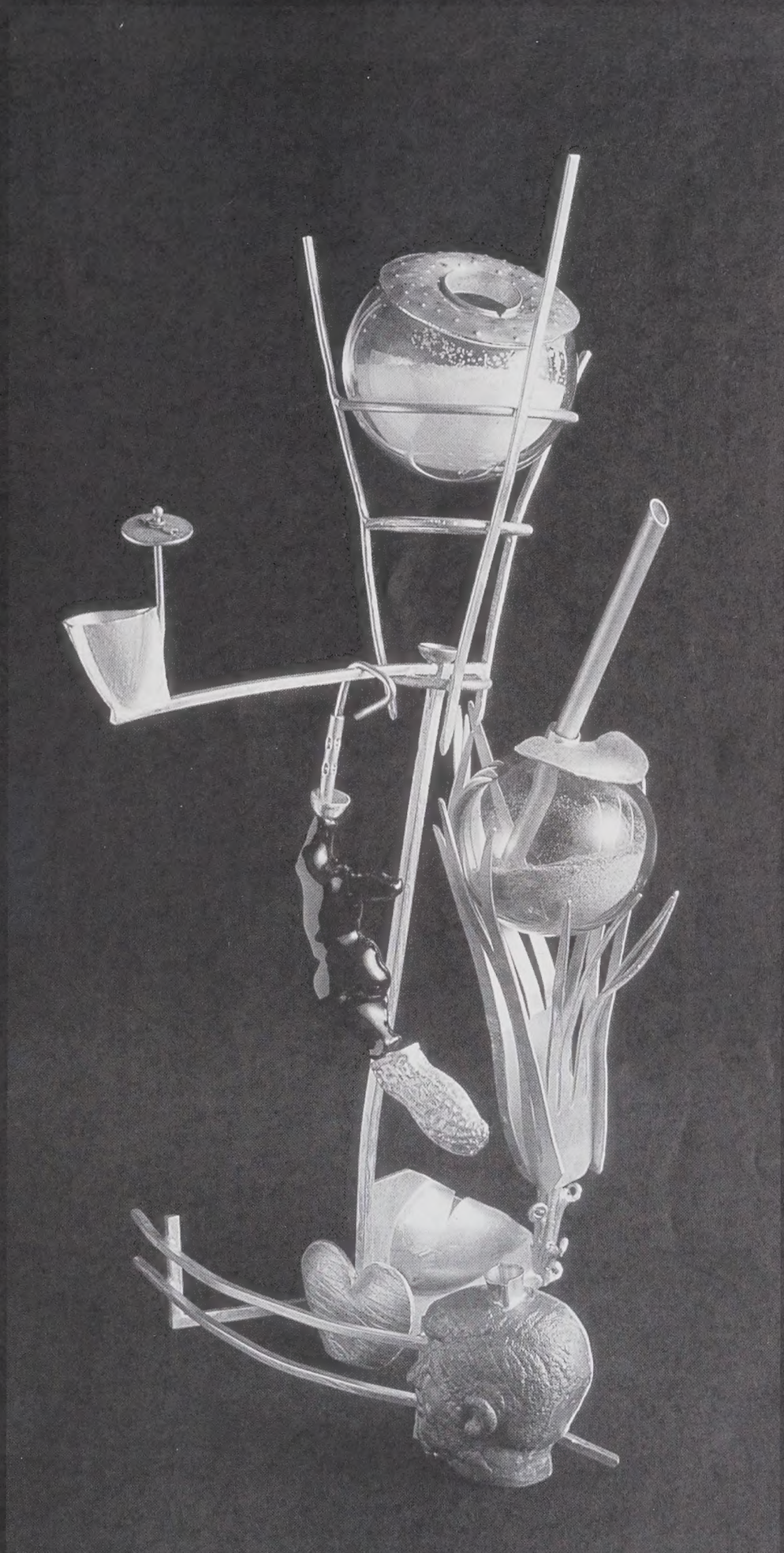
Above, left
Margaret F. Mount
Ersilia Series Rings, 1995
silver, brass, copper,
found objects, 1½ x 8 x 2"

Above, right
Anissa A. Cordova
Knotted Comb, 1995
nickle plated copper
6½ x 10 x 1½"

Right, center
Fabergé
Large Kovsch, 1899-1908
gilded silver, cloisonné enamel,
amethysts, 6¼" l.

Right, below
Egg, 1906
gold, diamonds, pearls,
flourite, enamel, 4⁹⁄₁₆" h.
Manufacturer: Picq-Lavabre,
for Cartier Paris.
The Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York.
Bequest of Laird Shields
Goldsborough, 1951.
Photo Courtesy
the Metropolitan Museum
of Art in conjunction
with Cartier 1900 – 1939,
an exhibition running from
April 2 – August 3, 1997.

Right
Vernon Theiss
Spice of Life, 1995
sterling silver, copper, enamel,
glass, salt, pepper, 15 x 11 x 5"



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contingency and doubt. Such ruptures of continuity may be created by including seemingly unnecessary details, obvious disjunctures created by an ostensibly awkward joining of elements, or by the juxtaposition of apparently incompatible materials.

Juxtaposition of forms and content may be more closely correlative to the construction of our memories and selves. Metalsmith Vernon Theiss has stated:

> The complexity of communication derives from the intertwined layers of our psyche, acting as both protection and barrier.... The language at times becomes a visual narrative of words and metaphorical images. The words and imagery illuminate not only the decorative surfaces, reliquary feelings, but suggest to animate one's own personal perspective. The passion of this language symbolizes a microcosm where one identifies themselves and show issues of the complex environment.[3]

Employing such a complexity in his formal structures Theiss does, in fact, create works which display a *personal perspective*. Seemingly joined by both solder and delicate balance, constructed from disparate materials, and referencing both manufactured and natural forms and substances, Theiss's *Spice of Life* refuses both sculptural and iconographical unity. Even his use of the pun on *spice* forces viewers to consider the slippery quality of language and more importantly the evasive nature of meaning and experience.

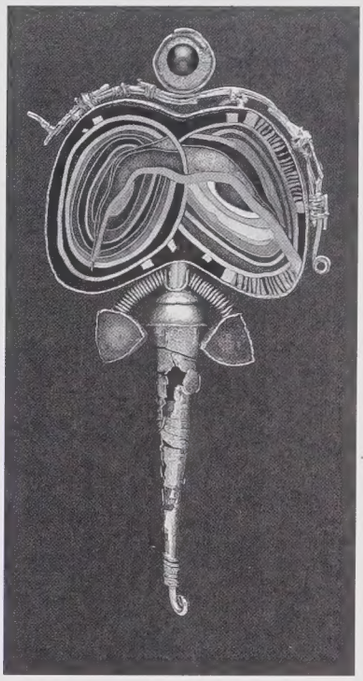
Both visual and verbal puns in works and titles de-center and disrupt fixed meaning; such intentional confusion is contrary to high modernist practice. Sarah Hall's *Opteacal Infuser* is at least two separate things at the same time. Multivalently eyeglasses, goggles, and tea ball the work confuses singularity of function which is concommitant with modern design. One can easily imagine the fun that could be had should we wear the goggles while sipping at a very proper tea. Experiencing the work through a photograph, one can not avoid thinking of the tea ball also as a halter top or bra. One can be assured that these extra/other meanings are interpretations that would not only upset a more modernist artist but that they are equally meanings and *mis*-interpretations that a different artist would assiduously forestall.

Inevitably, when suggesting that excess is antithetical to simplification, clarity, and reduction, critics and artists alike must confront the concept *postmodern*. This term, already old enough to have become overused and misunderstood, serves as an antipode to the fictive notion of reductive and simple forms as inherently progressive.

William Harper has suggested that his profusion of both materials and multicultural borrowings is a result of "a *postmodern* attitude toward production."[4] And certainly now many artists and critics have eschewed the purity of modernist form and content to seek instead a multiplicity and contingency of meanings which engender more formally, materially, and narratively complex works. Although to simply posit that any form of cultural appropriation is always both postmodern and excessive is incorrect, there certainly are many metalsmiths who borrow and/or quote from a variety of cultures as a way to critique or challenge the hegemony of western culture and its manifestations.

Other metalsmiths find that a whimsical pastiche of western cultural forms can have a liberating effect on both style and on audience's responses to it. Martha Hapeman is informed by Walt Disney, Tim Burton, Art Nouveau, and Victorian furniture in her series of fanciful chairs which serve as sites/stand-ins/catalysts for familial relationships and interactions. To view these chairs metaphorically as characters around a table enables one to understand how associated behaviors are considered excessive, if not downright unacceptable by the *proper* Mother and Father. Yet the sense of wonder and play, as intoned in Hapeman's chairs are elements that are necessary to a healthy family life.

Particularly in functional forms, such as chairs, teapots, and flatware, any deviation which may impede or complicate utility is identified as excessive. *Good design*, we have been told, is beautiful *and* functional. However what we lose in this equation is an understanding of the function of the decorative, the joviality that may enhance a meal, the sheer pleasure of color and abstract shapes, or even the more blatant and oft maligned function of decoration as an obvious display of wealth and status.



Above
William Harper
Fabergé's Twins, 1993
gold cloisonné enamel,
24k, sterling silver, tourmaline,
pearls, 6¼ x 3⅓ x ⅗"

Left,
clockwise from upper left

Sarah Hall
Opteacal Infuser, 1994
silver, brass, 3 x 8 x 3"

Judith Kaufman
Untitled, (pin)

Marjorie Schick
Necklace, 1993
painted papier maché, wood
23¾ x 23 x 6"

Mardi Jo Cohen
Assorted Spoons
sterling silver, formica, stones,
acrylic, 6½ x 2 x 1¼"

Martha Hapeman
Table Talk, 1995
sterling, copper, brass, lace,
ebony, agate, onyx,
mother-of-pearl, 9 x 12 x 12"
Photograph by Tim Thayer

Mardi Jo Cohen's *Spoons* serve the palate as they engage the chromatic palette. (Excessive puns are distasteful.) Carnivalesque colored shapes pepper the surfaces. Cabochons and cameos top the handles. Curiously these forms owe something to early twentieth century design, yet they seem to have taken the color experimentations of Sonia Delauney, Stanton MacDonald Wright, and Wassily Kandinsky in a different direction. Even should one wish to read *Postmodernism* as simply a style and not as a challenge to Modernism, Cohen's spoons still mark an embrace of coloristic and material extravagance that unseats and unsettles the control, fixity, and chromatic unity of Bauhaus inspired forms. Their party-colored surfaces and playful shapes evince a light hearted sense of humor that is inimical to Modernism, a movement seldom known for levity.

Anissa Cordova's *Knotted Comb* is a toiletry object with an attitude. Unlike its functional, properly behaved, and well designed companions on the dressing table it fights back, confronting a bad-hair morning with its own cranky obstinance. It is this very disorder which modern design seeks to control and excessive design seeks to liberate.

Margaret F. Mount's *Ersilia Series Rings* offer fairly sleek contemporary style rings which have been invaded by time and nature. The forms are reminincescent of Mark DiSuvero or John Henry sculptures but have been overtaken and interupted by lichens, pine cones, uncut and unpolished stones, and patinated copper which suggest time, wear, oxidation, and decay. It is as if Piranesi had etched the Seagram's building in New York a thousand years from now though reduced to the scale of a finger.

Paradoxically, those who acquire jewelry are particularly disturbed by an ostentatious display of substance. In modernist design gold, already charged with material value, is formed the simplest and purest of shapes and curves, eliciting hushed appreciations of its *classical* beauty. Conversely, the most we can give the ornate, precious, jewel encrusted objects of the Victorian era is a kind of camp appreciation. In fact our exclamations are often as over the top as we perceive the work to be. Seeking a kind of balance we confer a parodied, exaggerated, and often insincere assent to what we perceive as an extreme and cynical use of materials. Often excess is posited less antinomously against austerity and more against balance, and is frequently identified in the apparent transgressions of the boundaries of forms and behaviors more than in simple over-abundance.

When I first experienced the work of Vicki Eisenfeld and Judith Kaufman I remember my dismay and shock at the profusion of color and the plethora of materials in an almost sinful display. Yet I returned again and again to the works. My aloofness gave way to a kind of annihilating indulgence: color, reflection, a flash of gold, accretions, and layers each seeking to affirm their own meaning/resonance, yet each element clouded, covered, obscured, obfuscated by another; every suspected formal order wonderfully and richly disrupted by another; not a lack of form, but a profusion of forms, an excess of forms, more than could be easily absorbed or categorized or explained. The work finally struck me as

Above, left to right

Barbara Stutman
Power Accessory,
(bracelet), 1992–3
copper, patinas, enamel,
paint, knitting, 3½ x 6"

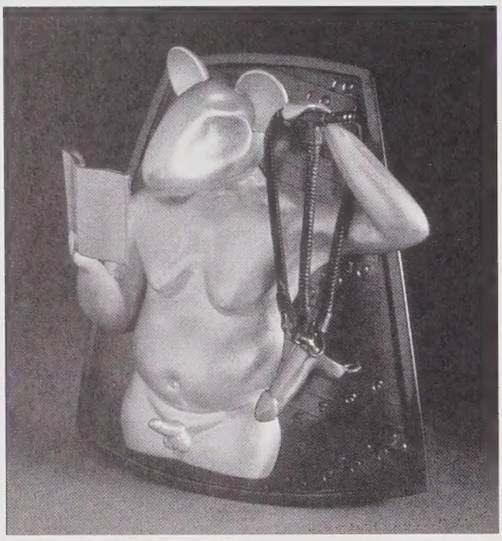
Barbara Stutman
3 Tampon Holder/Brooches, 1993
magnet wire, brass, copper,
spandex, tampons, spool knit, knit,
crochet, sewing

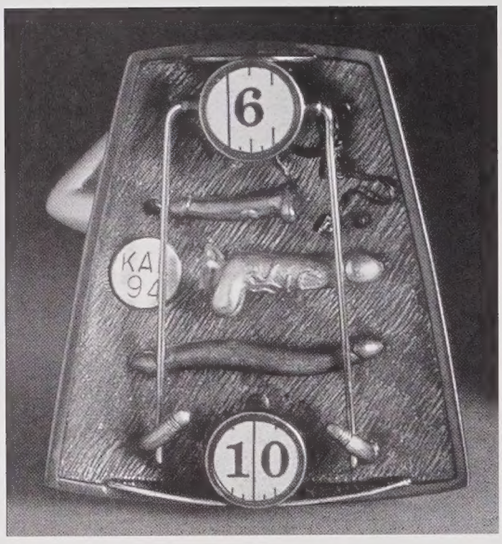
Barbara Stutman
A Show of Her Hand, (ring), 1995
fine silver, sterling, silver,
24k leaf, plastic spool knit,
wrapped, 3⅛ x ¾ x ⅝"

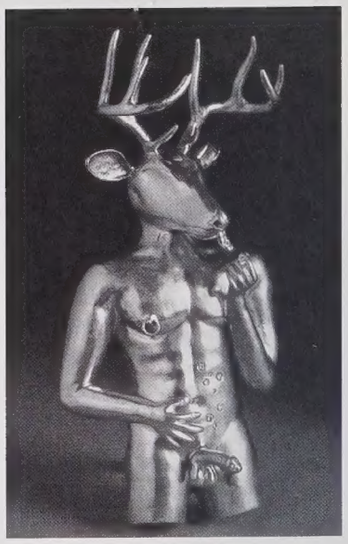
Barbara Stutman
Queen for a Day, (ring), 1995
18k, fine silver, sterling
silver, spool knit, knit, cast
2 5/16 x 1⅞ x 15/16"

Photographs by Pierre Fauteux

Right
Vicki Eisenfeld
"Dragon Tail" Brooch, 1993
14k, 18k, 22k golds in
yellow, pink, white, green,
green tourmaline,
aquamarine, diamonds
5¼ x 2½"
Photograph by James Beards







Above, left to right

Keith A. Lewis
Building Self, (pin), 1994
sterling silver, 24k plate,
wooden ruler, 9 x 6 cm

Keith A. Lewis
Building Self, (pin back)

Keith A. Lewis
Salt Lick (Unlikely Self Portrait as a Porn Star), 1996
sterling silver, 24k gold plate,
diamonds, chased, cast,
fabricated, 6 x 11 x 3.5 cm

extremely honest despite the formally and sensuously dangerous potential of such honesty. These artists asserted their aesthetic of indulgence, and were unafraid of confusion, the multiplicity of meanings, and even the possibility of no meanings.

Both Eisenfeld and Kaufman exuberantly shatter the acceptable boundaries of a piece. Unlike the work of Marjorie Schick who asks us to consider questions of wearabilty and scale, these artists' works, though wearable in as much as they are small, are troubling, jangly, pushy. Eisenfield's works even splay off of the shoulder or wrist. While constructed of traditional materials, each element breaks out to assert its own color and materiality, each substance is decentered by the reflections, overlappings, and competitions of its neighbors. And contrary to Modernism such exuberance is liberating.

It is common to find certain formative practices within feminist production, the work of gay artists, and artists of color in strategies which challenge the hegemony of modernism. Many of these artists, long pushed to the margins of mainstream culture, seek to undermine the visual rules used and perfected by their oppressors. Transgressions of both form and propriety undermine the authority of mainstream culture while opening a place for alternate voices and viewpoints. Excess has often been relegated to the cultural boundaries: i.e. both the extremely wealthy and the poor are allowed a kind of excess of behavior and materials that is eschewed by the majority. Marginalized cultures also often seek the confusion of excess, the slipping of boundaries, which contentiously challenge the strict and often inflexible definitions of the controlling culture. Such critical practice engages the extremes of behavior and material, employing exaggeration to disrupt social codes.

Like Arline Fisch, Barbara Stutman employs textile techniques in the creation of her predominately metal objects. Unlike Fisch, however, who seems to use such techniques primarily as processes for making beautiful and unique objects, Stutman uses knitting, crochet, and tatting to break down the boundaries between craft practices and their aesthetic and cultural associations. Stutman's objects inevitably bring to mind kitschy crocheted toilet paper covers, or knitted poodle bottle sleeves. Such objects, associated with local state fairs, popular home project magazines, and primarily female hobby-crafts, elide the distinctions between high and low art. The excess is here associated with camp, the excess of bad taste, or the excess of time and energy unaccompanied by institutionally learned skills and refinement: historically the only response acceptable in regards to many women's craft productions.

Additionally a number of Stutman's objects are associated with particularly female bodily functions and activities. From the very beginnings of western *high* culture to the relatively recent present, a woman's body has been seen by men from Plato to Clarence Thomas as a site of: excess, a lack of restraint and decorum, and untidy nature.[5]

Decorum involves restraint and acceptable boundaries. Stutman's works exceed the boundaries of both visual and functional decorum. It is not that a formal reading does not reveal information, rather it is more that formal reading is unable to contend with all

of that *other stuff* which intercedes in a reading of Stutman's works. In a work with a purely formal intent, a social, economic, cultural, or personal interpretation seems out of place, incongruous, a waste of time. Our attention is formally requested and such attention will be justly rewarded with the appropriate amount of aesthetic satisfaction, a balance, a quid pro quo. In excessive works, however, one feels led down false paths. Elements remain inexplicable, bothersome, some prickly itch, that does not give in to a remedy. We may feel that we have given too much to the work and it fails to satisfy, or that the work gives us more than is needed and leaves us unsure of the proper resolution.

Modernism has always sought to contain the excesses of the body and the contingencies of life. When the high modernist architect Le Courbusier referred to houses as "machines for living" he posited a well regulated and ordered domestic existence, the inhabitant as a unit within the production of life. This regulation went even further when Modernism sought to define proper subject matters, processes, and contexts: form follows function. According to many, when such logically defined boundaries are breached, excess follows. Keith Lewis rather consistently seeks to transgress the boundaries of acceptable jewelry, particularly in his insistence on creating works in which the subject matter is personal, sexual, and anatomically specific, and is often a hybridization of animal and human forms. Yet within this transgressive practice, Lewis exercises careful craftsmanship and rather traditional ideas concerning the types of jewelry which he makes: brooches, pendants, necklaces. What disturbs us is neither the presence of figuration nor the existence of personal narrative in the works, it is instead the aggressively adamant presence of the body in the figuration, and the unspeakably personal nature of the narrative. We do not object to figurative brooches, we may, however, be dismayed by the insistent genitalia that affirms the figures most primal humanity asserting a lack of balance between exquisite craft and blatant sexuality. Seldom have modernist critics shied away from discussions of abstract sensuality. But here Lewis denounces euphemisms with what seems, to many accustomed to a more restrained idiom, an almost childlike, excessive preoccupation with genitalia.

As both a practicing jeweler and an articulate theorist, Lewis increases our discomfort through his careful and intelligent understanding of the history of the medium. Victorian mourning jewelry, reliquary lockets, jewelry as *aides de memoires*, and as *momento mori*, have a much longer history than the modernist notions of jewelry as pure form. Such pre-modern ammunition disturbs the foundations of our modernist practice. Numerous artists have effectively argued that an artwork, like the culture that produces it does not have to be logical, linear, sculpturally closed or centered, or formally unified to reflect and promote both formal and content dependent advancements.

To many, any practice is neither excessive nor distasteful as long as it displays itself in balance, a code for propriety. Particularly in work in which we perceive a political agenda we are made uncomfortable by what we categorize as a lack of propriety.
We seek ways to contain the zealots, forcing them into the margins or alternatively spotlighting their madness as public spectacle, entertainment, or exotic otherness. It is not so much the zealotry that we fear as the zealots outside of their boundaries. Thus a skillful madman/woman frightens us because they engage our confusion and disrupt our boundaries. Excessive trespass, slumming, the stated desires to move beyond the distinction of class, intelligence, presumption, arrogance – both Stutman and Lewis blur those boundaries by their skill and their exercise of near flawless craft.

Of course, it is necessary to maintain the idea that excess is relative. The phrase *too much* slides freely between the poles of denial and indulgence yet our tendency is to situate the mean toward the pole of restraint. Without valorizing avant garde practice (itself a product of modernist thinking and progressivity) it is still important to encourage and discuss the strategies of numerous alternative practices. I would contend that intentional or not, the strategy of excess is a critical and necessary practice. Metalsmiths limit themselves when they repudiate the pleasures and the confusions of excess under the influence of the shiny and fictive absolute of Modernism and good design. Undoubtedly clean, restrained, simple forms and the integrity of materials still have much to show and tell us, but there is an equal amount of sensation and understanding to be gleaned from pleasure, indulgence, and the carnival of excess.

Frank C. Lewis is the editor of Metalsmith.

Notes

[1] I will be using the term modernism throughout this text in a rather generalized and simplistic way. The various practices which I hope to lump under this imprecise and admittedly overused rubric include the simple and machine aesthetic of both the arts and crafts movement and the Bauhaus and the more ideologically charged views of modernism as articulated by individuals such as Roger Fry, Naum Gabo, Antoin Pevsner, and Clement Greenberg. The essence of the arguments of these individuals is that an artwork should address only the issues and concerns which are found specifically in the materials and processes of that particular practice, and that an artist should seek to achieve a significant, (universally apprehensible) form, stripped of any specifically cultural, temporal, and political concerns. What almost all of these positions share is a respect for unified forms, the truth to materials, a seamless joining of materials, and a readily perceivable visual gestalt. While I am sure that most of my readers have some familiarity with the formal principles of the arts and crafts movement, the Bauhaus and its more commercial offshoot in things like Scandinavian design I suggest that interested viewers read Clement Greenberg's "Avant Garde and Kitsch" in *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume I, Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*, ed. John O'Brian, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988): 5-22, as an excellent introduction to the political and ideological implications of post World War II, American modernism.

[2] *Clement Greenberg, The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume I, Perceptions and Judgments, 1939-1944*, ed. John O'Brian, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988): 23-41.

[3] Vernon Theiss, "Artist Statement" (1996 *Metalsmith Exhibition in Print* Archives).

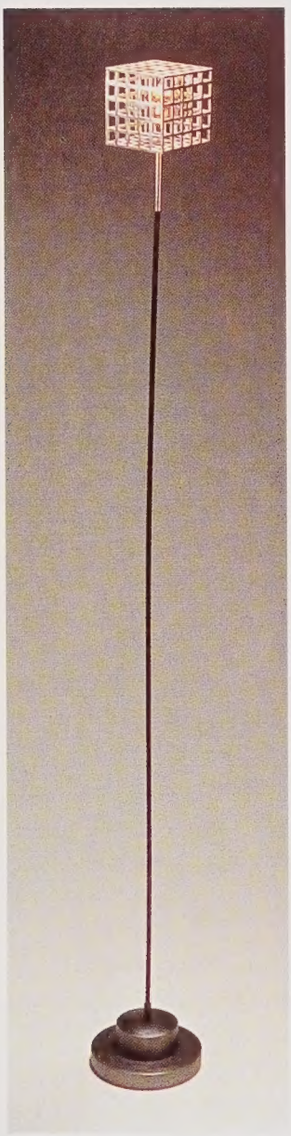
[4] William Harper, Presentation "New Metals Order" (1993 SNAG Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio)

[5] Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 23.

Reluctant Bodies: An Interior View

Julia Barello

Text by Michal Ann Carley



The human body is the ground for all repetition.[1]

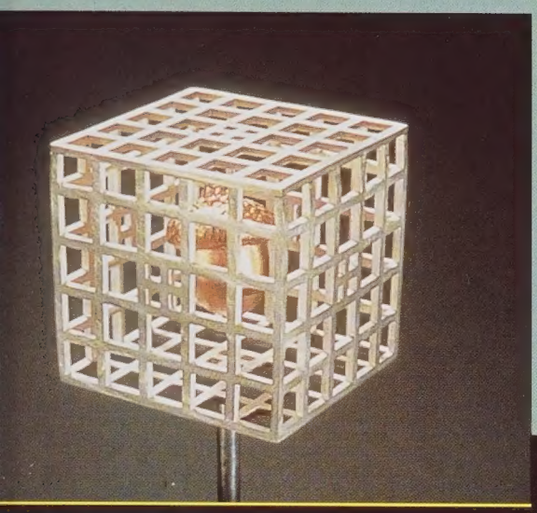
Ultimately, the site of substantiation is the body. With it we live and breath, about it we study and examine, outside of it we fantasize, in it we philosophize and fear, onto it we adorn and attach markers of our being. As practitioners of the body we inextricably exist in them and demand their completeness, yet regularly retreat in our desire and vulnerability against finitude.

As we live and breath we concomitantly feel the need to attest to our life and breath, which has compelled humankind from the beginning of questioning to investigate our being and interrogate its efficacy. Practices as diverse as lode stones which when floated on water mysteriously prescribed precise alignment of ancient sailors' ships to the north, or the Greek and Roman practice of studying fowl entrails to foresee specific events in the future, or pithing a frog to destroy its spinal cord in order to examine its [still living] body were all constructed to reveal knowledge. Mechanisms of divination have been designed to expose fact through either mysticism or empirical investigation, and traditional western society believes that the more technologically advanced the study, the greater certitude we attain. Thus, how the body informs and the informed body beg their own questions, belying their function of and as discourse.

Clearly meaning, discourse, and implicitly, knowledge is not stable. We experience ourselves through the body, both sensate and ethereal, and attempt to order and know that experience by attaching codes of signification to structures which we have established to chart meaning. Encyclopedias, lexicons, manuals, documentations, and instruments are all methods by which society attempts to fix and measure what is discrete. But what is discrete? What does not exist in the flux of past and future, part and whole, each desiring the other? It is the vicissitudes of this bodily discourse that Julia Barello constructs into animated, contingent objects, to be worn, used, coveted, and feared, creating an elastic exchange between viewer and object.

"How is the body known; how is it imagined?"
Julia Barello

Barello moved to the cold, some feel hostile, some feel invigorating, environment of Wisconsin in 1990. She fabricated sculptural body adornments with elegant, cultivated rose cane, embellished with its own thorns, from which emerge elements created from precious and semiprecious metals. *Slice* extends the organic arm of the rose cane by reinventing the extended branch and thorn of cast silver which are disrupted in the union by a globular node of mokume-gane. If worn, the thorns pierce the wearer's body and perhaps signify a voluntary penance; if only viewed, the desire to locate imaginatively the site of the piece on the body's landscape provokes a social contract with the [in]delicate object. Its (our) existence cannot be fixed either bodily, as it (we) will surely decompose, or metaphorically, as it adorns and hurts,



Opposite page
Caged Acorn, 1992
silver, steel,
bronze, acorn,
gold leaf
31 x 4 x 4"

Left
Caged Acorn, (detail)

Below
Slice, (detail), 1991
mokume-gane, silver, rose cane
12 x 3 x 3"

Photographs on pages 22 and 23
by Richard Gehrke

is beautiful and hateful. Its mechanisms of coding are constructed; it is the amalgamation of disparate materials and desires, a contraction of permanence and instability.

Such paradigmatic, still ever present structures of dichotomic relations in language and culture are so pervasive as to be unavailable for explication. However pairings such as nature/culture, virgin/whore, male/female, good/bad, inside/outside, body/mind, and transcendental/empirical are emphatically contested in contemporary experience and culture theory. It is Barello's aim to call these same essentialist structures into question, tenaciously and provocatively challenging our comfort level. *Caged Acorn*, 1992 is precisely that. Perched upon a meter long slender steel bar, an acorn, made immortal (not really) by gold leaf, trembles inside a meticulously crafted, gridded box. Perhaps cloying, this exhibit of fixidity is an endeavor to reify alterity, alerting us to our dependence on such polarities and categorization. Without the captured, there would be no freedom, without organic form we could not perceive of the geometric, without the display of isolated rarity we could not conceive of ubiquity, without the precious and assiduously acquired, we could not understand the disposable, the residual, the inconsequential.

Barello chooses methods and materials which are not mysterious or secretive, wishing instead to openly display them for examination, requesting that the viewer participate in that as well. The artist uses construction and fabrication as working methods to situate the interrogation of meaning which is itself constructed. She sees the purity of traditional methods of working metal as forging an impasse; timeless and universal they stand in for a status and power which is unyielding. Likewise, the viewer's imposition of their own conjecture and perception of rarefied specialness onto a work of art, and specifically an object of personal adornment, supports a commodity posture of permanence and immortality.

"Is the yearning for the object, exempt from time,
reflective of a human yearning to escape
the cycle of life and death which is constant?"
Julia Barello

In 1992 Julia Barello began creating works which reenacted the processes of harboring and containing a relic, making pseudo-scientific devices to measure those relics, and finally, in an heretical act, she did not find, but instead cast the relics themselves. This collapse of religious piety and its fanatical belief in the recuperation of the body[part] which would act as a powerful agent, and the belief in the efficacy of scientific discovery as manifested in containment and display is the philosophical basis for this series.

The relic is believed to be a fragment related to the saint which through transubstantiation intercedes for the faithful. Metalsmiths have long been fascinated with the reliquary which enters the domain of culture as a powerful object and which is highly crafted, beautiful, and enacts spiritual symbolism. While the romantic desire to craft an object which is cherished for its beauty and its meaning is useful as a motivational/inspirational factor in making, Barello torques this impulse in order to withhold the anticipated pleasure. Standing in for the master creator she fashions not the carrier but the relic itself.

Decisions, Decisions is a weighing device which in the laboratory functions by achieving perfect balance, "a stable state characterized by cancellation of all forces by equal opposing forces."[2] Two identical pans, meticulously compartmentalized into broken concentric bands of oxidized and satin finished silver, hang upon the measuring (divining) rod separating and connecting the two. Barello's playful naming situates through visual punning how one makes decisions – from the emotions and from the intellect. It is necessary that the foot upon which the scales balance be stable, immutable, certainly fixed. With delight one recognizes the base of Barello's contraption is a cast bronze heart, suggestive of pulsation, emptiness, fullness, the locus of the lived body.

Acorn Weights is a bricolage which layers the history of the crafting of the container, which was appropriated, and relics, which were made, and their functions, utilities, and purposes, which necessarily must include/impact the past, present, and future, just as relics and their reliquaries must. The silver acorns are cast from an original living substance, a process which destroys the acorns. As seeds they would either germinate to create new life or provide sustenance to other creatures, transmuting their life (or death). Viewer/users are provoked to evaluate their own psychological relationship to the objects, in their perpetual permanence and instability. The artist made the objects – relics – to fit the case, forming the relic to fit

the reliquary which foregrounds the act of possession, fetishizing. The perfectly hollowed out openings in the bakelite case, which was created with the technological innovation and skill of the early 20th century, encase and protect the internal objects and situate the weights/acorns/relics as objects which are coveted and somehow signify a system on which we would like to depend. When the young chemistry student acquires their prized possession of a scientist's box of weights to be used to analyze and measure materials, these material objects become the code for and guarantor of knowledge. Just as a reliquary houses and confirms the relic.

Methods and contraptions of scientific investigation and particularly medicine have become the point of inspiration and resistance in Barello's current work. Her *Adornments* series is a group of works which systematically decode and code particular bodily dysfunctions as illustrated in early twentieth century color lithographic prints, made for then surgical specialists.

> *I think I recognize these objects as apparatuses of healing. The hanging illustration defines the musculature of an abdomen with clarity and precision. It mechanically diagrams the nephrectomy at stage I which shows in aged color the incision through layers of fat and muscle. The large almond pit-shaped gold pin is mounted on a slender birch pedestal, just high enough for me to easily feel its relationship to my body. Nephrectomy is to wrap around my abdomen if I follow the prescribed directions:* Release catch. Remove pin stem. Place under left ribs. Insert stem into garment. Slide in full length. Replace stem in clasp. Close. *This won't fit under my rib cage. It will pinch at my waist and poke up into my ribs and the pin will prick my belly if I bend at all.*

When worn like modern therapeutic devices the *adornments* are pointed, uncomfortable, making the wearer vulnerable to the device itself while protecting and making their body impermeable to outside, hostile aberration, like some form of medical torture. One is acutely aware of the craftlessness of the displayed inner body and its processes contrasted with the beauty of the representation, as immutable and breathless as they are. Each adornment is carefully shaped to conform to the configuration of the [man's] body, flat and unrippled, cool and polished on the back side where it is to come into direct contact with the skin of the wearer. The incised image on the front is the doubling of the surgical procedure, the method of investigation and analysis which is carefully and prescriptively rendered in the accompanying lithograph. The object/device is made of silver – resilient yet imperfect – and is covered with an extra cutaneous layer of gold, splicing the body of the piece onto the body of the wearer through accretion and modification.

Obviously, the more we understand (know) the more we are comfortable with the processes of our own bodies. When we can scientifically analyze and diagram the body's function, we can feel more in control of its dysfunction. As we advance into a new millennium most of us recognize that we must simply put our faith – again – in our medical providers to sustain and maintain our bodies as medical technology has far surpassed our pedestrian understanding. Magnetic Resonance Imaging, autocadlike programs which manipulate and *see* our interiors from all points of view, intravenal laser heart surgery, growing new human tissue for transplant for reconstructive purposes are all technologies and procedures which seem surreal and akin to relying on the holographic doctor from *Voyager*. However, Barello exploits our comfort in a nostalgic turn to the simple yet exactingly illustrated lithographic diagrams from the late 19th and early 20th centuries which were the teaching devices for medical personnel.

Barbara Stafford has claimed that it was through visual cognition based on new printing technologies in the 18th century that medical science became more precise and believable.[3] The development of the 8 color lithographic process enabled the readers/learners to distinguish one form from another, and to discern transparent layers, thus making their procedures more accurate. It is this type of illustration that Barello uses. Fitted into a transparent field, we are invited to analyze its recto and verso as it almost hovers over the fabricated metal adornment/device.

Since the time of the ancients societies have been fascinated with the investigation and mapping of the body. That this investigation has been self reflexive and has attempted to both reinfuse and ameliorate the perpetual schism between the soul and the corporeal body configures into the genealogy of the discovered body. Cultural conditions and beliefs constrained and directed the discovery and assessment of that body through routes which engaged religion and science, philosophy and evidence, and totem and taboo. An illustration

Decisions, Decisions, 1992
mixed media
24 x 20 x 8"

Photograph by Richard Gehrke

of this is the trajectory of Leonardo's anatomical drawings of hemisected figures engaged in coitus, ca. 1493. The primary source for Leonardo's drawings was the work of the medieval anatomist Mondino printed in Latin without illustrations in 1478. Leonardo drew the pathway of the semen as originating from the brain and through the spinal cord because, "medieval anatomists needed to create a boundary between the urine, which was viewed as polluting (at least to the degree that it reflected pathology), and the semen, the source of the new soul."[4] Leonardo misread his subject, the actual dissected body and translated Mondino's verbal imagery into a visual regime which was in turn modified (literally so) and presented as engraved illustrations for scientific texts in the late 18th century as an Enlightenment tool for instruction. These altered prints/texts then [mis]informed Freud in his discussions on the artist in which he used Leonardo's drawing, collapsed and folded into Leonardo the artist, as his archetype for creative (dysfunctional) genius. It is no wonder that this trajectory of misses, slippages of images, texts, and signifiers becomes the failed but variously used model for visualizing thus understanding the body and its [split] connection to the psyche or soul.

The *Adornment* series is indebted to just this type of perpetual slippage of knowledge and incantation. These are not transparent bodies, wounds, nor are they scars. They reify procedures which mark human intervention into the living body, attempts at making it whole. They chart the interior body topographically, precisely, and cleanly – as clean as the diagrams purport that incisions can be made, substances can be excavated, and tumors incised. The physician crafts with seeming omnipotence and perfection, as does the artist. The lie bespeaks a futuristic ultrasonic phaser which slices without cutting, cauterizes without burning, removes the epidermis and underlying tissue while reconstructing an embellishment.

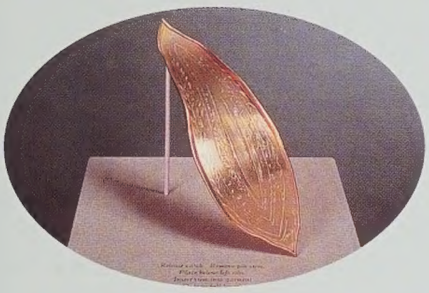
When Barello traveled in Florence she was predictably intrigued with the wax anatomical models of Clemente Susine and Guiseppe Ferrini in the collection in La Specola. These body doubles remain in a pure state of arrested decay and contain and sustain the oft stated parallelism of female sexuality and death.[5] There, the reclining *Venuses* (1782), with heads tilted back in almost ecstasy, mouths partially opened, hair cascading over their shoulders, abdomens splayed open, some with their breasts inverted to reveal their vulnerability beneath the surface in their transparent glass coffins, are, as was Snow White to Prince Charming, at once desirable and dead, desirable because they are thought to be dead. Julia Barello engages these inherited tropes, yet plays them out for us to examine in a manner that is far removed from the ghoulish. The precision, fine finish, and elegant animated shapes of her works inaugurate desire on the part of the viewer. The viewer's participation, both sensate and imagined, with the process of the works demands a cognitive and visual presence.

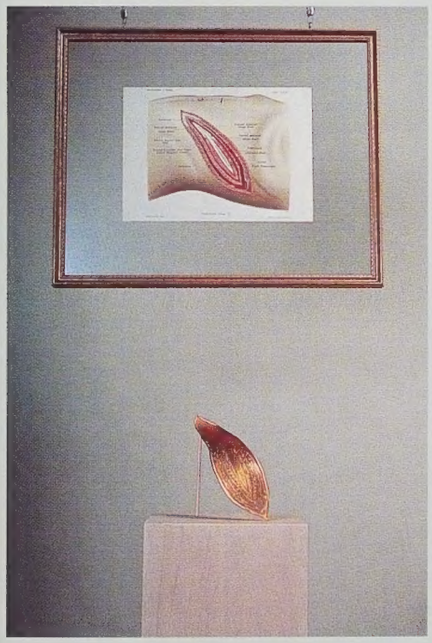
Right
Vascular Studies V: Anterior,
(brooch), 1996
sterling silver, x-ray, maple
19 x 16 x 7"

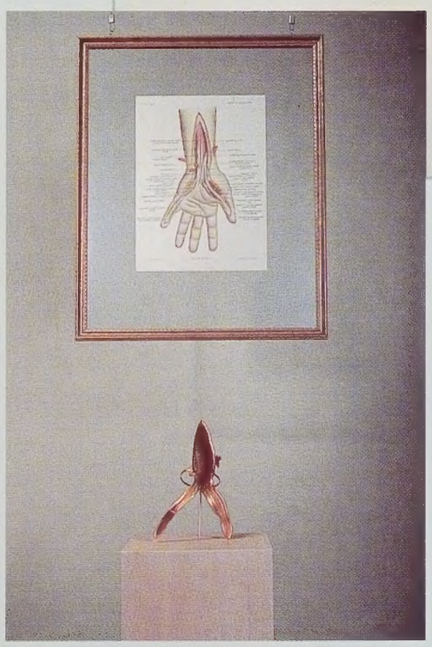
Bottom right
Adornments: Cellulitis of the Hand,
(bracelet), 1994
litho, sterling silver, 24k, birch
74 x 16 x 24"

Bottom left
Adornments: Nephrectomy (Stage 1),
(brooch), 1994
litho, sterling silver, 24k, birch
74 x 20 x 24"

Below
Adornments: Nephrectomy (Stage 1),
(brooch), detail







*The segments of this collar each twist their linden leaf shapes ever so slightly to delicately, asymmetrically balance a wrapping and turning of my neck as if adorning and fetishizing it. I imagine the cool gold hugging my throat so as to elongate it into elegant repose. As I play out the instructions with my body...*Tilt head backwards, Place necklace around neck *I begin to feel rather claustrophobic and vulnerable in it (my) display. With my head tilted back I am a reflection of the diagram* Cellulitus of the Neck. *Except that he is male, I am not. Is the necklace meant for my slender neck? Am I to posture myself in this way and be adorned, embellished, and coded beautiful and cured?*

The most recent works are called the *Vascular Series.* Each piece is named as correlative to the site of the body which it tracks: *Internal Juggler; Breast; Lung; Subclavian; Anterior, Hands.* As a piece of jewelry, or body modification as Barello calls them, they fit comfortably and do not dramatically restrict the wearer's movement as did the *Adornments.* Constructed out of tapered, sterling silver wire the pieces are shaped to fit the exterior contours of the body which are relatively convex and not subject to undercutting and piercing by the sharp protruding ends. When not being worn these works are superimposed onto x-rays, tones of silver salts on flimsy plastic, of the interior bony structure of a human being. They are genderless, bloodless, and only reveal fluid of a particularly dense composition. The silver brooches are imbedded into/onto the framed x-rays which provide the superstructure for their vascular essence.

Vascular Studies I: Breast, (brooch), 1996
sterling silver, x-ray, maple
19 x 16 x 7"

Each brooch is an elegantly accurate transposition of a fragment of the human vascular system. They do not mark disease or even vulnerability, no longer dissect or appear to dissect the inert body. They instead invert the internal and the external to reveal the human interior with perpiscuity. These are clean and tidy, there is no spilled blood, no pain, rather an aestheticization, (an anesthetization?) or perhaps an essentialization of our body functions as being akin to other natural phenomena: mole burrows under the soft earth, mollusk shell tracks in the wet, moving sand; tree branches against the evening sky; trails of rain dispersing on impenetrable glass. What keeps these works from being lost in a circuit of romantic reverie?

Each of the sites of the vascular series is one that is of extraordinary importance to either the life of the body itself: i.e. *Internal Jungler* and *Lung*; or one which is of extraordinary and inexplicable importance to humans as living beings: i.e. the *Breast* which is the site of suckle and nourishment to the young, sensitivity and confusion to the adolescent, and sensual eroticism to the mature; and the *Hands* which are the extensions of our almost every thought, engaging and employing our desires and judgments. The vascular system is compellingly beautiful, pulsating and moving outward into explosions of tributaries. It is also the passageway for important fluid transmission in the body, without which we would cease to exist, immediately.

Drugs have been developed to inexorably alter blood movement throughout the body: Cumidine, hemoglobin builders, blood clotting factors, cholesterol lowering drugs. Scientific investigation and medicine can mediate our ability to function, even live, as bodily beings. To recognize and embody our discomfort as humans in contested territory is the path on which Julia Barello's work puts us. Craft as manifested by the desire for order, for precise and repeatable regularity contracts with incoherent spasms of the corruptible, the biological.

"Is adornment a burden?"
Julia Barello

The appeal of Barello's work lies in its very failure to resolve, foregrounding the failure of our systems of mapping and ordering, taunting our demise; like the mask of Tuntenkamen which covers not the beautiful face of a young man but the dusty, eggshell fragility of a skull. Yet the mask forever remains beautiful, nevertheless.

Michal Ann Carley is a critic and artist who resides in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Her latest installation is entitled Specimens.

Notes

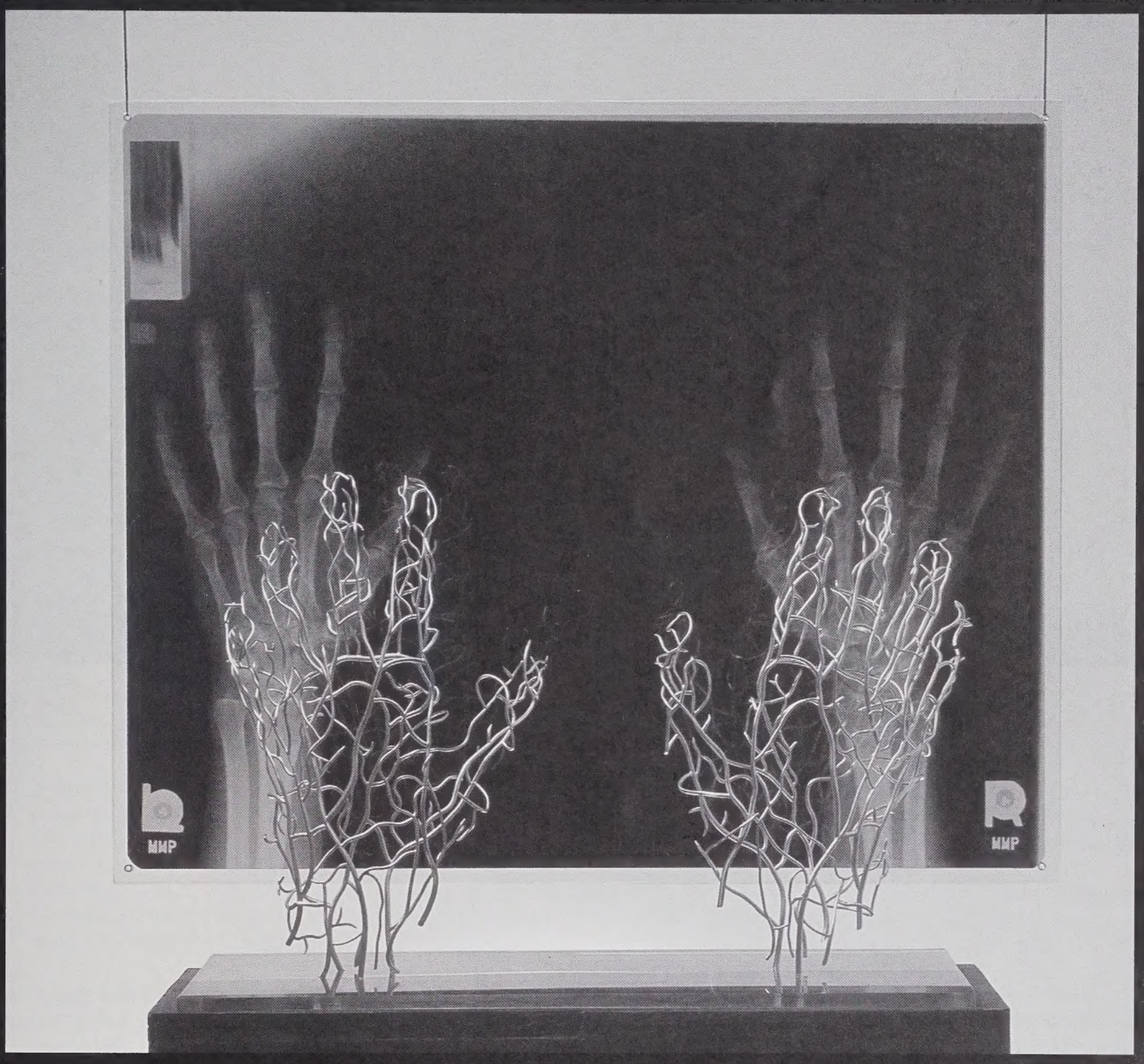
[1]John O'Neill in "Foucault's Optics" in *Visual Culture* ed. by Chris Jenks (London: Routledge), 1995: 194.

[2]*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language,* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company) 1969 p.100

[3] Barbara Stafford, *About Looking,* (Cambridge: MIT Press) 1996: 36.

[4]Sander L. Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS,* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press) 1988: 55.

[5]Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity and the aesthetic (New York: Routledge) 1992* is a provocative discussion and exegesis of woman's' death as trope, its textualization and visualization as inherited and mediated in modern (1700 – present) western society.



The Subcutaneous Vascular System of the Hands (Anterior View), 1995
silver, 24k
18 x 15 x 10"

Observations

Sharon Boardway

Left to right

Leaf Necklace, 1996
bronze, silver, stone
Photograph by Richard Nicol

Leaf Choker, 1996
mixed stones, sterling, bronze
Photograph by Douglas Yaple

Slate Rose Necklace, 1995
slate, fine and sterling silver
Photograph by Douglas Yaple

Orthoceras Leaf Pendant, 1996
beachstones, fossils, fine and sterling silver
Photograph by Richard Nicol

Somewhere between the inside and the outside is a perimeter which demarcates two spaces. This disputable place has engaged artists in critical debate for centuries: between the Florentine's *disegno* and the Venetian's atmospheric painterly effects; of the Impressionist's dissolution of space and time into an accretion of colored hatched strokes which was then torqued by the Neoimpressionists such as Gauguin who sequestered color and plane into a symbolic fixity. All of this debate surrounded the use of the edge: that which defines and solidifies. Pliny tells of the Corinthian maid who traced the outline of her departing lover created by a lamp in order to fix in space his presence, a memory made tangible in the act of tracing.

It is just this edge that is the preoccupation of Sharon Boardway, who works her gathered sea pebbles, used chalkboard slate, and discovered fossils into necklaces and brooches which recall a mythic past and questionable present. She chisels stones or fossils into organic leaflike shapes and marries them to a sterling armature, together, equivocating between inside and outside, positive and negative, object and field. Emerging from the face of the stone are words, hand-scripted, enigmatic pulses from poetic utterances – *night sky* – on a sloped fragment which is separated from its other by another edge, or on a necklace – *The Rose* – in cursive script runs sporadically from one falling stone petal to the next – *the fragility – of the flower – unbruised – penetrates – space.* The petal as part of a complete flower is ethereal and fragile, wanting of a support, yet compelling in its vulnerability. When worn, the petals of Boardway's flower necklace connect to each other unpredictably at edges which ripple across the neck, marking, but not fixing the whole.

A REVOLUTIONARY NEW TECHNIQUE
FOR METALSMITHS

Transfer Etching

Text by Katharine S. Wood with Paul Silverman

Photographs by Paul Silverman

Etching is immensely rewarding – whatever one can draw can be etched. There is great satisfaction in seeing the translation of one's designs into the permanence and beauty of metal. Unfortunately, elaborate designs and fine details can make the application of resist by hand an hours-long project. Also, until recently, only photo etching gave consistently reliable, accurate, and precise results, but this method was complex and required specialized knowledge and equipment. However, Paul Silverman has developed a new technique that will radically change the etching process for metalsmiths.

Paul, a photographer by profession, began experimenting in an attempt to simplify the photo-etching process. Recognizing that printed circuits had to be etched with total accuracy, he utilized that technology and has come up with a new method of transfer etching for metalsmiths and enamelists.

In recent years, many artists have used Xeroxed images and applied them directly to metal with acetone. This method was intriguing and still performs well for a light surface etch. However, it has distinct limitations when a deeper or more reliable etch is required. Small lines do not always hold up; larger areas may develop pinholes. With this new transfer technique, the finest lines can be quickly applied and etched with total accuracy for many hours, resulting in a clean, deep etch. Paul has generously supplied all his notes for this article. As an artist and teacher of metalwork and enamel, I have tested his discoveries and further refined and developed them in my own work and in the classroom.

In this new technique, that I will refer to as *transfer etching*, minimal processing is required to successfully prepare a piece for etching. This procedure has a simplicity that enables the artist to focus primarily on the design aspects of the work instead of dwelling at length on a number of technical problems. Furthermore, multiples are easily created, thereby encouraging the artist to experiment with an infinite number of variations on the original theme. Finally, as mentioned previously, this new technique reproduces one's work so cleanly and accurately that it mimics actual photo-etching, but without the complex procedures and expenses.

When Paul first came to me with this new technique, he was interested in seeing how extensively it could be used in specific artistic applications. Would there be limitations that would hinder its use as an artistic tool or, conversely, could the technique bring the realm of etching to new levels? Other than ease of application, what would be its other advantages over traditional methods? These were some of the questions we asked ourselves as we set out to further explore the process.

Before we began our experimentation, we had to prepare the metal (we used copper). First, any raised lips or burrs on the metal surface or its edges had to be filed down so that the metal was completely smooth and flat, with no warpage or even minutely raised areas. We did, however, leave burrs on the backs of the pieces to help prevent them from sliding around during the transferal process.

Antonia Schwed
Elephant Mask Necklace
champlevé enamel on silver
(etched copper
original cast in sterling)

The next step involved the same age-old chore that precedes most metalwork: the cleaning of the metal. It is especially important with this technique to clean well. Paul and I used a combination of both mechanical and chemical methods, using an abrasive sponge (such as a Scotch-Brite) with a chlorine cleanser to do the job. After rinsing well, we wiped the copper with alcohol and thereafter held the metal – wearing rubber or vinyl gloves – only by the edges so that no finger grease would be transferred to the surface.

At this point, Paul brought out a product called PNP-Blue paper.* This PNP blue is a fairly new product used to transfer printed circuitry to metal. It is essentially a printed circuit board transfer film for laser printers and photocopiers and is used for high precision professional PCB layouts. We had already Xeroxed the images we wanted to transfer onto the paper.

Earlier, Paul and I both had tried a variety of photocopy machines to Xerox our designs onto the PNP paper and had success with many of them. The images had to be printed onto the *dull* side of the paper and this took a little experimentation as each machine was different. We also found that some machines could not handle the thick acetate-like paper, particularly older machines that had rollers which could jam, or ones that would overheat; these were to be avoided at all costs! Newer, direct-feed copiers worked best. Paul also had some success with a laser printer.

Katharine Wood
Terra Incognita
original drawing

We made sure that the final Xeroxed images on the PNP were dark – i. e. as black as possible, but without smudges on the blank (open) areas. After *wasting* a few PNP sheets by Xeroxing only a single image on each one, we found that by Xeroxing a whole collection of designs (pasted in advance on a sheet of black construction paper), we could fill up an entire sheet and minimize waste. Afterwards, individual designs would be cut out and used as needed. One warning: everything came out reversed when transferred, so this had to be taken into account, especially with lettering!

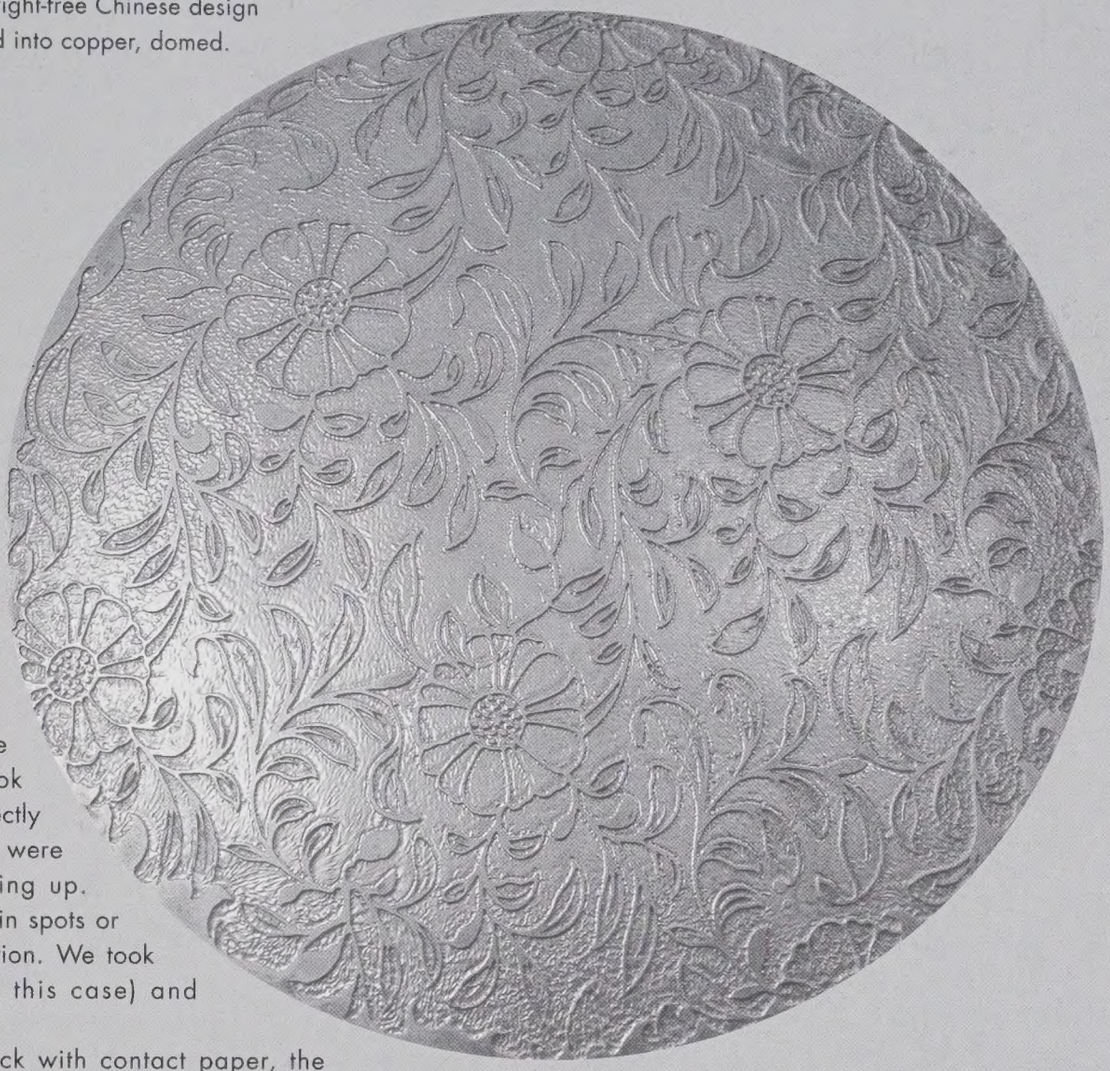
Since etching deals with the positive (raised unetched metal) and negative (etched-away areas), no half-tones or shaded areas could be transferred – at least not with any accuracy, although interesting textural effects might be obtained with a little experimentation. Color images, too, are of no use in etching, so only high-contrast, black and white, linear drawings were transferred (although some were extremely detailed). After some initial problems we found that adhesion was greatly improved if the surrounding area or border of the image was black. In other words, the more area transferred (i.e. the more black in and/or around the image), the better the adhesion.

Choosing images provided a challenge. Before working with original artwork, we wanted to test the accuracy of transferal and subsequent etching with intricate, difficult-to-reproduce, traditional designs. Paul worked on a variety of Celtic patterns, obtained from a Dover copyright-free design book. For one example I chose an elaborate Chinese ornament also from Dover books and found that this, too, was etched with complete accuracy.

We first assembled our Xeroxed images on the PNP blue paper, the recently cleaned, flat pieces of metal, and a household iron (with Teflon or Silverstone coating). We gave a quick swipe of alcohol to the metal to retard last minute oxidation. We centered the PNP paper face and dull side down onto the metal, which was placed on a block of wood. With the temperature of the iron on high, we ironed the image onto the metal, starting with the edges first, tacking down, then ironing towards the center. The metal became extremely hot and we had to take care not to burn ourselves (thus the block of wood for rotating the piece while ironing). We kept the iron moving in a circular motion.

At one point, the PNP paper began to wrinkle and bubble a bit; this we promptly ironed down and we slightly lowered the temperature setting. Experimentation with temperature settings and ironing times was key, depending on the type of iron, the size of the piece, the design, and the metal used. It usually took only about 5 or 10 minutes. We knew we were done when the entire design showed up black through the PNP paper. (One cannot initially see the design when starting to iron, as it is face down). We let the piece cool totally and then carefully peeled off the PNP sheet. We cleaned the cooled iron with acetone.

During the course of experimentation, we under-ironed and the image turned up blue (not black) or, worse, it did not adhere at all. In these cases, we checked that the temperature was high enough and continued to iron, taking care not to move the image. A few times we over-ironed (too long, too hot), and some of the finer lines blocked up. In these instances, we simply took a scribe and gently scratched off the blocked areas.



Copyright-free Chinese design etched into copper, domed.

When all was done we had 2 (almost) perfectly transferred images in black (this acts as the resist) on copper. And it only took 5–10 minutes! I say "almost perfectly transferred image" because there were areas that needed a little touching up. Sometimes a fine line was broken in spots or a large area needed extra protection. We took traditional resist (asphaltum in this case) and touched up those parts.

Finally, we covered the back with contact paper, the edges with resist or electrical tape and proceeded to etch in the traditional manner. We used copper as the base metal and ferric chloride as the etchant. Paul tried a few pieces with nickel silver and brass and had success with them, although ironing times were somewhat longer. Silver, however, may present more of a problem. Since silver cannot be etched with ferric chloride, nitric acid must be used, and this powerful acid tended to destroy the Xeroxed resist image. Since neither Paul nor I like to use nitric acid because of its toxicity, we sought out other solutions for working in silver. In the past few months, we have heard of some success using a very dilute solution of nitric; still, we feel this approach should be used only by very experienced etchers who are familiar with the hazards, handling, and disposal of nitric acid, and who have access to a studio with the proper equipment.

One solution for silversmiths would be to have one's etched copper originals cast in silver. For example, two pieces, created by New York jeweler and expert in the champlevé enamel technique, Antonia Schwed, were first created from original drawings that were Xeroxed onto PNP blue paper and subsequently transferred and etched in copper. They were cast in sterling silver and enameled. Still another solution for silversmiths would be to roller print the etched design onto fine silver, using a very thin (previously etched) copper or brass sheet as a master.

After Paul and I had worked through these basics, I started to teach my students to apply transfer etching to their own needs. As for my own work, I returned to my studio to pursue this technique. While it was satisfying to take an elaborate copyright-free design and etch it with total accuracy there was not much purpose or creativity in merely reproducing someone else's designs, no matter how complex or clever! The true excitement was in being able to quickly and accurately reproduce my own art onto metal without the long, drawn-out process of applying resist by hand. There are endless possibilities of alterations and variations on one's artwork that can be made with a minimum of technical effort.

I took an original design of mine that had taken a particularly long time to compose. Applying resist by hand was certainly possible, but would have taken quite some time, especially as I tend to re-cover my first layer of traditional resist with a second coating and even, occasionally, a third. However, with transfer etching, I was able to transfer my entire drawing in under 10 minutes, with results equal to or better than if I had laboriously painted the resist on by hand! As I am primarily an enamelist, after etching I applied a variety of vitreous enamels in both transparents and opaques.

The next project involved a design that I felt was especially adaptable to variations. Searching through a Dover copyright-free design book, I selected a Persian ornament to use as filler in the background of my original drawing. I cut and pasted this filler onto a Xerox of my drawing, along with another fill pasted within the outline of the figure's robe. Certain areas I *erased* with white-out. Other small alterations were added with a fine-tipped black magic marker. Thus was created – with a minimum of labor – the first variation of the original. The original drawing was left unchanged and ready for future use. This new variation was Xeroxed onto the PNP paper, transferred to copper, and etched. Half-way through the etching process, a *double etch* (*basse-taille*) was incorporated into the design. However, the resist for this stage had to be applied in the traditional manner, by hand and brush, since the metal at that point was no longer completely flat (it is partially *eaten out* by the acid). When the etching was completed, the piece was enameled and gold-plated.

Recreating an original design any number of times was remarkably easy and, for an enamelist such as myself, each piece can be enameled differently. Making alterations and variations on the Xerox of an original was not difficult and opened the door for limitless exploration. I transferred my original drawing again to copper and used an unusual enameling technique (firescale painting) to create still another effect. Another time, I cut and pasted a different combination of fills onto the Xeroxed original for a third variation. Enameling this piece with an entirely different palette added to the altered effect. On one piece I used an incredibly ornate copyright-free pattern as a background and enameled a simple grisaille fly on the foreground.

These experiments are just the *tip of the iceberg* and there is much waiting to be explored. There are many applications of this method. Metalsmiths can pattern a whole sheet of metal and then cut out shapes from it for jewelry, sculpture, and other objects. In fact, anything requiring a textural background lends itself to this technique. Enamelists can use it for extremely detailed basse-taille or champlevé. Lapidaries can leave areas for gem-setting. Patinas can be applied to emphasize relief aspects. Copper etchings can be gold-plated. Artists can use computers to create endless variations of a design to etch. And multiples of a single drawing can be easily made, insuring accuracy and saving hours of work. There is still a great deal of room for experimentation with transfer etching – in fact, a whole world of possibilities await the imaginative metalsmith/artist.

Katharine Wood
Terra Incognita
drawing with copyright-free
Persian design

Paul Silverman has been a professional photographer for more than 15 years, specializing in abstract and fantasy imagery. He has exhibited extensively in New York, the metro area, and the midwest. He has supplied cover art for more than 90 textbooks. He also experiments with polyester resins, model and mold making, metal etching, woodworking, and lapidary.

Katharine S. Wood is a professional enamelist, working and teaching in New York and New Jersey. She has exhibited in numerous enamel and art shows, both nationally and internationally. She specializes in champlevé, fire-scale techniques, and mixed media, and teaches these techniques in workshops. When not in the studio, she can be found on the dance floor!

*PNP Blue is manufactured by Technics, Inc. of Ringoes, NJ and is distributed by Broken Images, Inc., 720 Monroe Street, 4C #2, Hoboken, NJ 07030.

Katharine Wood
Terra Inconita II, 1995
etched copper, champlevé
and basse-taille enamel

Katharine Wood
Facade, 1995
champlevé enamel on copper

Intimate Assemblages
Gina Westergard

Zephyr Gallery
Louisville, Kentucky
November 24, 1996 – January 4, 1997

by Sharon Harker

Gina Westergard's recent exhibition *Intimate Assemblages* at the Zephyr Gallery was a display of dynamic, engaging work with an enigmatic edge. Her pieces were mainly wearable pendants set in sculptural display stands. Since all the pieces have some sort of kinetic feature to be discovered – rocking, pivoting, sliding, rolling, magnetically linking and unlinking – they cried out to be played with. Also by touching and examining the piece, one could discover the pendant. In some of Westergard's work, the pendant is so well integrated with the stand, that it was difficult to pick out just by looking. It was always the artist's intent when designing these pieces, that viewers should be able to interact with them. Unfortunately, for security reasons, viewer interaction was not possible at this exhibition.

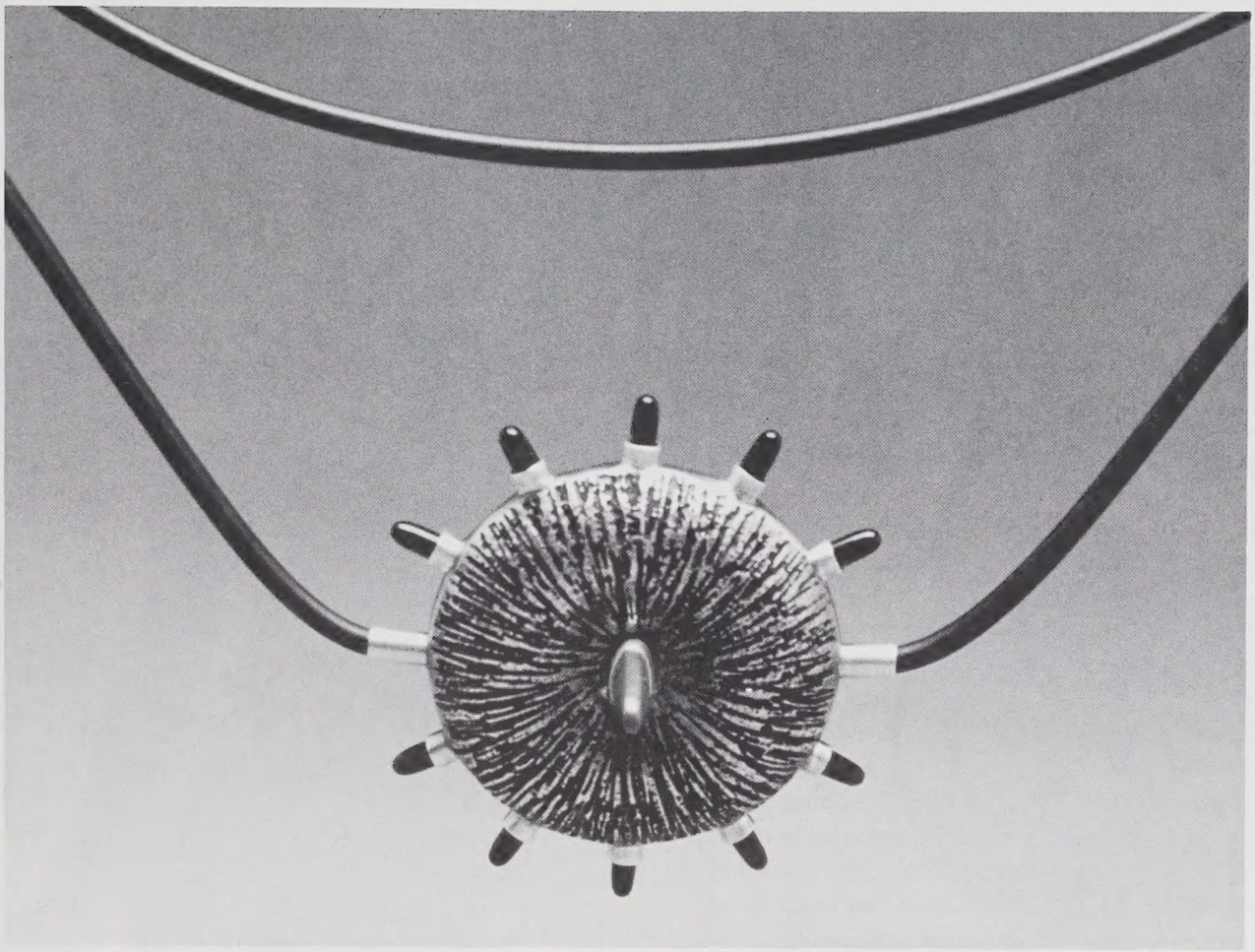
Toys and curious gadgets have been the inspiration behind Westergard's work since her graduate school days at Indiana University. She admires the minimal designs and ingenious engineering of such classic toys as the gyroscope, yo-yo, and spinning top. Their influence in her work is immediately apparent: her use of primary colors, basic shapes, and most importantly, movement. Movement is a common element in her work and usually the starting point for her designs. Other elements that define Westergard's work are unexpected combinations of materials and surface textures. The results are imaginative and playful.

In *Opposites Attract* two pendants are connected by a magnet. They are hung on separate snake chains and draped over an elegant silver wire sculpture that resembles the lines of a collarbone. True to form, her source of inspiration for this particular piece was a plastic pinball machine from a Cracker Jack box. The pendants can be worn together, connected by the magnet and viewed as a three-dimensional cylinder, or singularly, viewed as a two-dimensional circular shape. The wearer is given choices. It is characteristic of Westergard to encourage the owner/wearer to arrange the piece in different ways, allowing for more flexibility and personal interpretation. The two pendants have the same basic shape, but contrasting surface textures. Ball bearings are set in the center of each pendant, and roll inside their bezels when played with. Definitely, this is jewelry for the fidgeter!

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT

She Dances with Goose Bumps, 1996
sterling silver, hair, glass,
paint, patina, 6 x 3½ x 4½"
Photograph by Jim Nedresky

Vespertine, 1994
sterling silver, pewter, coral,
neoprene, paint, 2½" dia.



Vespertine is one piece that needs to be touched and examined to discover and disengage the necklace from the sculptural stand. The word *vespertine* refers to a flower opening and expanding during the evening hours. The stand is a spun copper Aladdinesque-shaped vessel resting on a dramatic silver wire arc. The copper vessel is textured and painted in a rich red enamel. It can be rocked back and forth on the linear arc beneath it. Mounted on the top of the vessel, as if it were a lid, is a saucer-shaped pewter pendant, etched and rubbed in black enamel. It resembles a mysterious, exotic flower. At first glance, it looks as if onyx bullets protrude all around the pendant. Actually, they are black neoprene points. Coral and lapis stones are set in the center on reverse sides of the pendant. *Vespertine* is a blend of classic toys: the pendant *Flower* by itself resembles a yo-yo, with the quirky addition of neoprene spikes all around; the pendant and vessel together resemble a top that does not spin, but rocks back and forth on a silver arc; the silver arc recalls the linear form of a gyroscope.

She Dances With Goose Bumps is an interesting departure from the other pieces presented in this show. It is a perfume decanter meant to be a miniature self-portrait. Like Westergard's other work, this piece has the same refined elegance, linearity in the frame, accents of color, and cleverly engineered kinetic features. However, unlike the artist's other designs, this one is more surrealistic than analytical. Conceptually, Westergard allowed her emotions and intuition to guide her in developing this idea into a finished piece. It is more spontaneous and startling. It is also the only piece in the show that was not designed to be worn. Instead of the pendant/sculpture duality found in most of her other pieces, Westergard created this piece to function as both decanter and wall sculpture.

Viewing *She Dances With Goose Bumps* one sees an elegant silver frame that forms the outline of the *body*. The *arms* form an arc which becomes a track for a pivoting bezel-set glass eye that slides back and forth, or stays perfectly balanced at the fulcrum. The glass eye is not human, but some ambiguous animal eye. A long lock of the artist's wavy black hair hangs gracefully down the side, off-setting the perfect symmetry of the piece. The perfume decanter *body* housed in the silver frame is painted in a pointillistic manner. Westergard masterfully combines and balances seemingly disparate elements in this design to create an unusual and powerful piece. As in surrealism, it is like something one might see in a dream, both disquieting and compelling.

Finding the balance, the *right mix*, is what Westergard strives for in design. The artist states her work "reflects the expressive in surface quality and the refined in design with the enigmatic in function." It is also a balance of linear vs. volume; formal vs. whimsical; and traditional materials vs. non-traditional. She successfully achieves her goals in this strong body of work. All of Westergard's pieces in this show are amusing, captivating, and mystifying. One can appreciate her thoughtful development, inventive solutions, skilled craftsmanship, and unique vision. Her pieces invite investigation. And hopefully, at her next exhibition, there will be a "Please Touch" sign by her work.

Sharon Harker is a metalsmith who resides in Dallas, Texas.

Elizabeth Glass

The Museums at Hartwick College
Oneonta, New York
September 7 – November 7, 1996

by William Baran-Mickle

This show by jeweler and sculptor Elizabeth Glass is an impressive milestone in a budding career. The life-sized forms made of hefty copper sheets protruding from the walls make a great impact. Glass's subject is the female human body. But her nudes are anything but depictions of ideal bodies. The artist makes plaster casts of her models to better understand the shape and fullness and to give her a map for the metal forming. The results are strong sculptures with an honest consciousness.

Catalina, the most extensive and resolved work in the exhibition, is a calf to shoulder section of a woman in a supine position. The form twists slightly over itself which requires a substantial projection from the wall. The leg-thigh overlay, the definition of the hip bone flowing into the rib cage, and the full buttock all show great care and facility with the material (a huge piece of copper) and the tools (hammer, sandbag, stakes). The relaxed, sleeping pose is transcribed from the physical to the psychological by Glass's surface treatment of gentle hammer marks and non-articulated surface coloring. A peacefulness is the result.

A number of Glass's works jut straight out from the wall. By the time viewers have approached them to understand their particular form, they have joined them. It is an intimate circumstance. These pieces are airy with exposed edges that curl and swoop with the figure and cut off without predictability. All of them allow, invite, and occasionally demand that the viewer peer into the concave/convex forms setting up a provocative conceptual dynamic: how easy to see the body, how much we desire to understand what is inside of each other. Here, curiosity does not lead to fulfillment, yet the fascination persists.

A rather startling untitled work begins at the wall with a woman's head and hair. The sleeping face, is tilted upward and is suitably vague in its features. The neck muscles are accentuated, gently contorted, blending into the collar bone and musculature of the upper chest. Further down and out toward the viewer, the breasts begin to swell, but very uncharacteristic forms are encountered instead. They are angular, shallow. Beginning with the aureole area, the breasts are abruptly bulged out and collapsed down again in an unsettling, inhuman condition. These two areas are (re)attached. Without benefit of the artist's explanation I would surmise that this work's subject was breast cancer and the expression of the devastation of the treatments to curtail the disease. Glass delivers a moving and powerful sculpture.

Not all the works were as well resolved but the competent rendering of the majority of forms far outweigh the misgivings.

William Baran Mickle is a metalsmith and frequent contributor to this magazine. He resides in Pittsford, New York.

Catalinia
hammered copper
4 x 1½'
Photo: Chris Jones

RIGHT
Kismet, 1995
copper, bronze wool, steel,
Plexiglas, 4 x 2 x ¾"

BELOW RIGHT
Handmade by Anonymous,
(detail), 1996
steel wool, red thread
8' diameter

Dense with Suggestion: Julia Jiannacopoulos

Gallery Naga
Boston, Massachusetts
December 6 – 21 and January 2 – 4, 1996

by Jane Port

Manipulating mass-market materials and forms with wit and humor, Julia Jiannacopoulos explores the reality that lurks behind the conventional facades of women's lives. All objects within the realm of domesticity become potential material or useful forms for this inventive artist. Brooches for special occasions, sterling and plated commercial flatware, an hour-glass, wooden clothespins, lemon reamers, and even a toilet brush play a role in this exhibition of around a dozen objects. Jiannacopoulos creates jewelry both for the body and for the home, a kind of extension of women's bodies in their role as traditional homemaker.

Spare and precise in form, Jiannacopoulos's works engaged the eye in a mannerly, even demure manner as one entered the gallery. Drawing more closely, viewers were rewarded with eloquent objects. The plain gray rug stretched out across a low platform was no ordinary floor covering. Eight feet in diameter, *Handmade by Anonymous* is a braided rug made of steel wool. Substituting this harsh, abrasive material for the usual worn, soft fabric pieces eloquently suggests the drudgery and discomfort involved. Doing handwork with such an abrasive material might be seen as a kind of penitential act, the red thread that joins the braids representing a trickle of blood. By performing the tedious, repetitive labor of braiding a large rug, the artist witnesses unheralded women and renders the work itself an elegy. In a similar mode *Chore Boy* is a pair of fish-net stockings crocheted from copper wire and displayed unceremoniously upside down on the bottom half of a department store mannequin.

The frilly and not very useful little half-aprons straight out of the 1950s are the source of Jiannacopoulos's telltale series of aprons. These pieces offer a witty and provocative variation on the large body jewelry of recent decades. Functional waistbands on all the aprons confirm their intended use as wearable jewelry. In *Regimental Apron* metal silhouette charms of children's heads intended for costume jewelry for Mom are woven into a closely-spaced grid of boys and girls. The apron shimmers like chain mail literally arming Mom for the trials and tribulations she will face.

Containing Appetite and Desire consists of a ready-made three-piece sterling flatware set confined within its own individually constructed cell. A ruler incised at the top and bottom of the object measures the exact degree of containment. Rendering these useful implements useless suggests the goal may be about as useful as it would be to stop breathing in order to avoid air pollution. Jiannacopoulos manages to unify concept and material to create a compelling work. The *Egg Timer* caught within a wire cage in the shape of a woman's body succinctly expresses the confines engendered by the biological clock within.

There is also undeniable humor in a steel wool rug, caged silverware, and brooches in which steel wool replaces the braided hair of earlier centuries. But these everyday objects that surround us are not treated with ridicule; rather, they are presented with a sense of humor while at the same time offering an unswerving look at the limits and injustices historically imposed on women.

Jane Port is a decorative arts historian. She lives in Wellesley, MA.

Richard Mafong
Executive Shirt
steel, silver, brass

Heritage and Diversity: North American Metal Arts Invitational Exhibition

Montgomery College Art Gallery
Rockville, Maryland
May 28 – July 31, 1996

by Marjorie Simon

It's almost impossible to do justice to the 75 object-makers whose works comprise this exhibition. As she did in her 1989 show of young Korean artists, curator Komelia Okim has presented a range of identities with a common thread. While some stayed within a familiar vocabulary, others seized an opportunity to change scale or materials. To the extent that artists confronted their own heritage, responses ranged from ethnicity and religion (predominantly Asian, Jewish, and Catholic) to an almost apologetic identification with Americanness and a heritage of object-making itself. For example, Tom Muir, Sharon Church, Douglas Zaruba, and Paulette Werger acknowledged such family traditions, while John Grant and Sandra Zilker cited their regional lineages.

Some people clearly referenced their physical or geographical environments, as in Sam Shaw's Paul Bunyan-sized necklace of weather-worn Maine rocks. A few aligned themselves with a mythical time or a culture that never was theirs, alluding to influences rather than actual heritage, such as John Cogswell assuming the mantle of generational traditions in choosing Judaic metalsmithing to represent him.

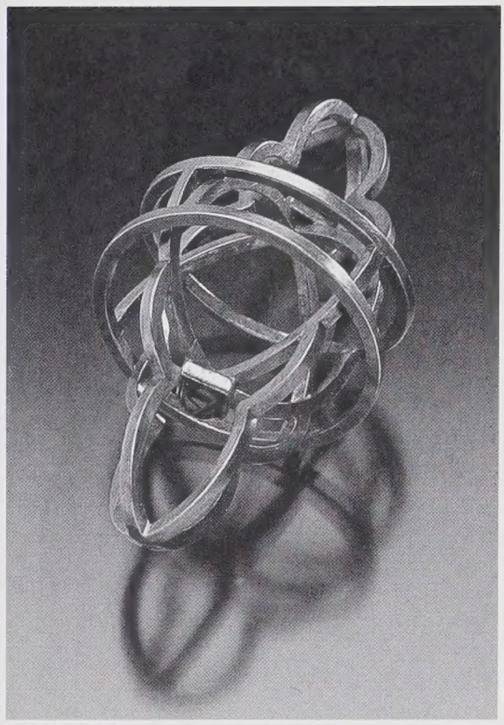
Especially rich were allusions to Asian culture, with works ranging from what might be considered an Eastern aesthetic of sensitivity to materials, to darkly political commentary on the status of Asians here and at home. Okim's *Harmony #3* expresses her interest in "relationships between people and landscapes" by means of her familiar pristine hollow forms. In contrast, Richard Mafong's silver *Executive Shirt* savages the stereotypical Chinese laundry in America. Its deadpan delivery produces more of a kick to the political solar-plexus than, say, Cheryll Leo-Gwin's more didactic, though finely-wrought, *Golden Lillies* (a reference to the bound feet of traditional Chinese women). Eun-Mee Chung's rich mixed-media wall constructions, vastly larger than her usually intimate jewelry, include frank references to Korean and Christian iconography. Such symbols would have been unrecognizable to me without the accompanying text, much like James Malenda's *1 Station*, the first of a proposed series on the stations of the cross.

The difficulty of decoding such symbols is a common one in looking at art and objects outside of one's culture. Such education requires an accompanying text to communicate the extra-visual meaning of narrative work. Fortunately, excerpts from the artists' written statements accompanied the pieces, thereby illuminating some narrative aspects of their work and lives (who knew David LaPlantz was part Sioux, Megan Corwin Cherokee?) Yet nowhere was craftsmanship subservient to narrative. Randy Long's exposition on Catholicism and her mother's death only enriched the visual experience of her *White Font.* And Beverly Penn's *A Bed of Roses*, more than a dozen plaster *beds* squeezed through a grid and adorned with cast thorns, was all the more grisly for her exacting control of materials.

In lieu of a catalogue, a double-sided poster accompanies the exhibition, giving some idea of the range of work. Komelia Okim is to be congratulated for rounding up not just the usual suspects for a bracing revue of some diverse origins of our discipline.

Marjorie Simon is a metalsmith, teacher, and writer who resides in Highland Park, New Jersey.

Grey Area #1, (bracelet), 1996
cast and fabricated sterling silver,
white cultured pearls, 4" dia.



Pendant Object, 1996
fabricated sterling silver,
green tourmaline, 1 x 2"

Gina Pankowski

MIA Gallery
Seattle, Washington
January 2 – February 2, 1997

by Robin Updike

Gina Pankowski's sleek, architectonic jewelry can be deceiving. A first-time viewer could be forgiven for seeing Pankowski's elegant and expertly crafted sterling silver chain link work as beautifully-designed but cool, streamlined, devoid of the kind of emotional punch that so many jewelry artists today strive for. At a time when narrative is all the rage, Pankowski opts for the abstract.

But a closer study of Pankowski's latest work at MIA Gallery is revealing. What looks like complex, abstract, chain link patterning in necklaces, bracelets, and even earrings can also be viewed as a series of interlocking vertebrae, eggs, and the rounded forms of seed pods. As in nature, Pankowski's shapes are repeated in varying sizes and formations. Like the life-supporting bones in a spinal column or the wondrously intertwined chain of genetic coding, Pankowski's links reflect the natural world's most organic and elemental structures.

The yin and yang of Pankowski's work is especially obvious in an untitled bracelet that started out as a linked chain of ovoids. The ovoids suggest the skeletal husks of plump seed pods. But Pankowski added an outer collar of nesting crescents that turn the bracelet into a lovely but potentially dangerous ornament. Wiggle your wrist a little while wearing it and the leaf-like crescents become a circlet of spiky claws. A female super hero might wear such a bracelet as a handy weapon.

Pankowski's judicious use of tiny cultured and freshwater pearls and semiprecious stones, including green tourmaline, underscores the point that these pieces are not only about sleek form. The gems are so small and subtle that they are easy to overlook. But in several bracelets a pearl no bigger than a pinhead is embedded inside each *egg* or *pod*. The symbolism of a pearl inside its protective shell – in this case a shell fabricated of sterling silver – is entrancing. A pearl is both a treasure and irritant to its mollusk host. The little gems add warmth to the work without compromising the considerable strength of its design.

On several bracelets and pendants Pankowski added a liver-of-sulfur patina and tumbled the pieces with steel shot. The process gave those pieces a dark, gunmetal, slightly rough finish that was a startling contrast to the mirror like finish of most of the work.

In the past, Pankowski has been so committed to the integrity of her chain link patterning and the line of her work that she has been reluctant to build clasps into necklaces or bracelets. Her new work, however, includes a number of ingenious and quite beautiful closures. In a choker of linked bone shapes, she has added a cherry-sized sliver globe that splits down the center with the tug of a small pin.

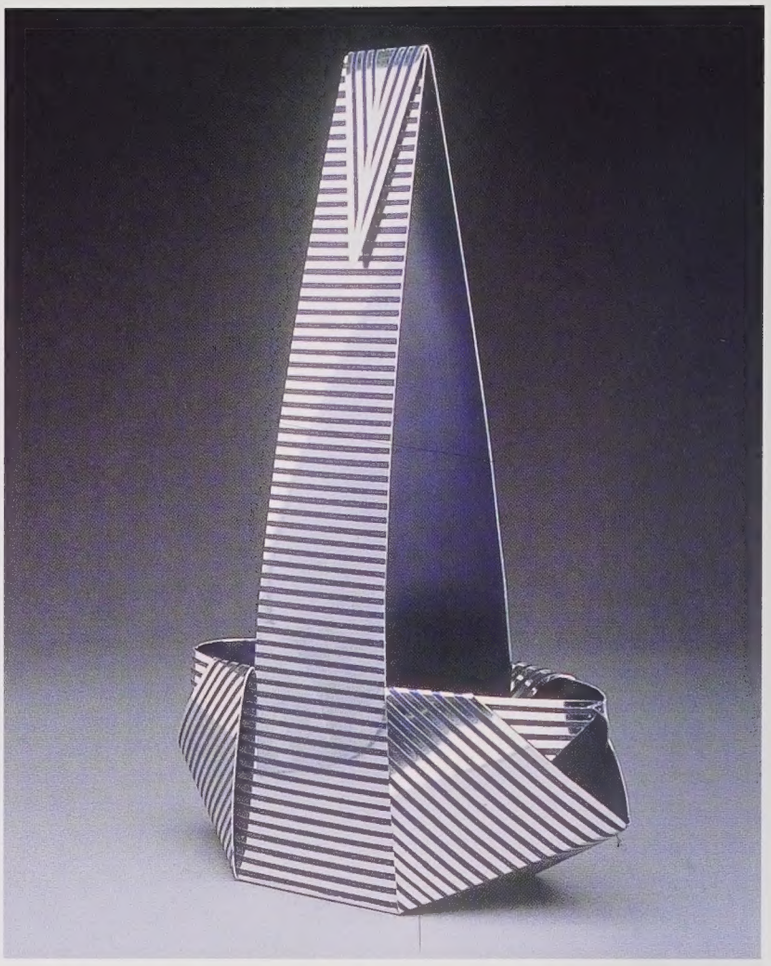
Best known for her elegant, labor-intensive chain-work, Pankowski also has been experimenting with brooches. Made with unusual semi-precious materials, including some white, snake-skin agate with the unsettling look of petrified tapioca, the brooches are odd little assemblages that reflect Pankowski's interest in gardening, plants, and organic shapes. Though the brooches lack the self-confidence and perfect pitch of her other work, they can be seen as works in progress, embryos for future pieces that may be more successful.

One of the most delightful aspects of the show was the creative display of the work. Seattle rug artist Patrice Schafer cut green astro-turf display mats in the shape of off-kilter fleurs-de-lis and whimsical botanical forms. With the green mats mounted on the walls, the jewelry was then pinned to the mats. Pankowski, also of Seattle, cut 8" high display stands out of sheet metal. The stands were curvy like table decorations at a ladies luncheon. With the gleaming silver jewelry draped over the metal forms and pinned to the astro-turf silhouettes, the show resembled a garden of topiary decked out in its finest jewelry. At any moment one expected to see Alice and the Queen of Hearts trying on the bracelets and necklaces.

Robin Updike is an art critic and writer who lives in Seattle, Washington.

RIGHT
Chunghi Choo
Vessel with Handle, 1996
aluminum, acrylic lacquer
15¾ x 11 x 4½"

FAR RIGHT
Barbara Nilausen-K
Kabuki (bowl), 1996
copper, Prisma color,
flat enamel paint, 24k gold foil,
UV Krylon, 6¼ x 23¾ x 23¾"



Forging Ahead: Contemporary Metalwork in Iowa

Davenport Museum of Art
Davenport, Iowa
October 10 – December 29, 1996

by Jean Sampel

Forging Ahead: Contemporary Metalwork in Iowa came very close to being a truly comprehensive survey of this art form in the state, on the occasion of Iowa's sesquicentennial anniversary. The Davenport Museum of Art director, William Steven Bradley and assistant curator Jane Milosch are to be commended for recognizing the strong body of art in metal in Iowa and for celebrating the artists in this most reputable forum.

The show was built on the shoulders of the professors at three institutions; Chunghi Choo, University of Iowa at Iowa City; Chuck Evans, Iowa State University in Ames; and Condon Kuhl, Drake University in Des Moines. Ms. Choo, whose academic background and impressive exhibition credits are documented in the excellent catalogue accompanying the show, and both present and former students constitute more than half of those whose work is shown. The diversity and individual strength of the pieces from this group are outstanding and become a tribute to her 28 years of devoted teaching and continuing support. We see a mini-retrospective of Choo's elegant vision from 1982 to the present. Two early pieces of her celebrated electroforming simply soar as her hallmark, while a graceful, ribbon-like collar and a folded aluminium basket form with lacquered pattern illustrate her consistent clarity of design.

Of Choo's protégés, the work of Delores Chance clearly echoes her mentor's elegant sensitivity. Corian and handmade paper are the primary elements of Chance's message bottles/sculptures with metalwork functionally enhancing each piece. Meiing Hsu's two anodized aluminium works also epitomize grace, touched by delicate color, controlled by mastery of process. Hsu has returned to Taiwan where she is now teaching, one of many extending Choo's sphere of influence. The lighthearted approach in Justine Zimmer's *Iowa Town* napkin ring set and in Dana Noble's *Ice Cream Scoop* as dripping cone, appeal to the playful child within every viewer. Louise Rauh succeeds in turning raw sheet aluminium into a mysteriously inviting *Closer Look at the Moon* bowl-form with textures and piercing.

Barbara Nilausen-K showed two large spun copper bowls of traditional profile, with dramatic red and gold painted and foil patterned surface. The graphics and imagery are bold and beautifully executed. The rationale for *Cantaloupe Purse* in sterling by Este Hart stretches credulity, though it is technically interesting and the craftsmanship is very good.

Two sculptors brought table forms in copper to the exhibition: John Myerly with *Portal I* and *Portal II*, and Kee-Ho Yuen with *Untitled* (side table with pear). Both have successfully handled their concerns with mass, geometry, and function in this larger format. Amy Vander Beek, a student of Yuen, offered a well-executed brooch: *Waiting*, a clever play on Dali's melting timepiece. Robert Sunderman's *Salad Serving Set*, a sleek open-book shape, could serve up luscious greens as art to nourish both body and soul. David Luck showed collages of metals, patinas, and techniques which are ambitious explorations of the plasticity of the medium. Luck and Sunderman, like so many of Choo's lifetime of students, continue to be motivated to do metalwork even though it is not their primary job.

Also in Iowa City, though new to the state, Donald Friedlich has been welcomed as artist-in-residence at the University of Iowa. His two slate brooches are beautifully understated sculpture.

The metalsmiths of central Iowa were born under the tutelage of Chuck Evans and Condon Kuhl. Evan's two brooches, both strong statements, must take a back seat to his complex sculpture, *Sake Service for Two*, which serves as the introduction to the exhibition and challenges any preconceptions of simple functionality. His wall-mounted table with sterling silver sake set employs multiple metals, patinas, and techniques and alludes to his sabbatical in Japan. Although only three of Evan's students from his strong 18-year history at ISU currently reside and work in Iowa, their pieces attest to his fine mentorship: Ann Wright Au's sumptuous rattle series illustrate her sleek style; Anne Clark's impeccable enameled brooch and earrings are but a glimpse into her broad range of artistic talents; and Melanie Parks bares her soul with an exquisite wall piece, *The Enemy Within: a Litany of Doubts*. All reflect mature work from professionals in the field. Another central Iowan, Sheena Thomas, brings the dimensional geometry of her Indiana University teacher, Alma Eikerman, to her fine hollowware and jewelry.

Although examples of Kuhl's work were not presented, two of his students honor him with their long-term dedication to his ideals of integrity and commitment to the arts: Susan Noland was represented by her elegant *Caviar Spoon* and *Condiment Set*, practical tools evolving from her own experience as a true gourmet. Billie Jean Thiede's studies with both Kuhl and Noland set her path to her present capable leadership of the metals department at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana as well as the Society of North American Goldsmiths as past president. Thiede's bronze mesh conceptual teapot, *Butte #EF-2* with its rich textures and patinas, is sculpture, a reflection of her interest in the I-Hsing teapots of China.

Applause to the Davenport Museum of Art for their support of metal arts in Iowa!

Jean Sampel is a metalsmith who lives in Ankeny, Iowa.

From the Editor

Writing a review is a brave and frequently difficult undertaking. Balancing one's opinions and prejudices against fairness and disinterested consideration and presenting the results of that exercise in a succinct and informed manner is a challenge that can only be justified by one's love and commitment to the fields of jewelry and metals. Recently a reviewer included with her review an unsolicited but thoughtful review of the reviewing process itself. As an editor I was so stuck by her clear articulation of some of the concerns of the task that I wish to share her thoughts with readers. I hope that this commentary will remind us all of our responsibility to works of art, history, intelligent discourse, and the goals of *Metalsmith* magazine. More selfishly, I also hope that Jean Sampel's observations will encourage others to try their hand at reviewing and documenting the quality and richness of our field for the future.

First I was flattered, then surprised, and finally, philosophical when given the opportunity to review the milestone show, *Forging Ahead: Contemporary Metalwork in Iowa at the Davenport Museum of Art*. It was flattering because as an Iowa native who has for the last 30 years served the people of Iowa as a retail designer/goldsmith, as mentor to other artists, and as a teacher and arts advocate in the state, it seemed a natural choice. It was a surprise, because in spite of being appropriate, it was awkward since I was not asked to be a participant in this important exhibition. I had, after all, closed my studio/gallery a year ago to *retire* and so, expediently, no longer existed. The philosophical part emerged as a realization that the review would be a way of claiming my rightful place in any survey with historical context about metalsmiths in Iowa.

I missed the invitation to the opening, mercifully, in a stack of unopened mail, so my visit to the show was practically a private showing. I bought a couple of copies of the catalogue, for $3.00 (+$1.00 for p&h) which I heartily recommend. It is excellent, well-illustrated, and ably researched by assistant curator, Jane Milosch. Nearly three fourths of Iowa's finest metal artists currently working in the state are presented.

Descending the museum stairs to the show, a hollow feeling of injustice hit me, along with the understanding that unjust actions anywhere can never be rescinded or rectified. That feeling soon gave way to enormous pride for the power, diversity, and quality of the work. My personal ties to 13 of the 30 artists go back to our beginnings, to many hopes and dreams shared, so I instantly recognized their work. I noted how few new pieces were among the familiar ones, fully understanding the whys for each of these people's inclusion. Had my work been included, it would certainly have been historical, so I do not throw stones. My colleagues at my shop and I wrestled endessly with this issue of priorities. We earned a living with our talents and gifts on a daily basis with new, valid pieces, yet hungered for those mythical greener pastures of *freedom*, to work free of others' constraints, the situation more often found in the academic setting. Claiming one's own time from time already promised seems illicit, somehow, yet undoubtedly releases the spirit for greater productivity in the long range.

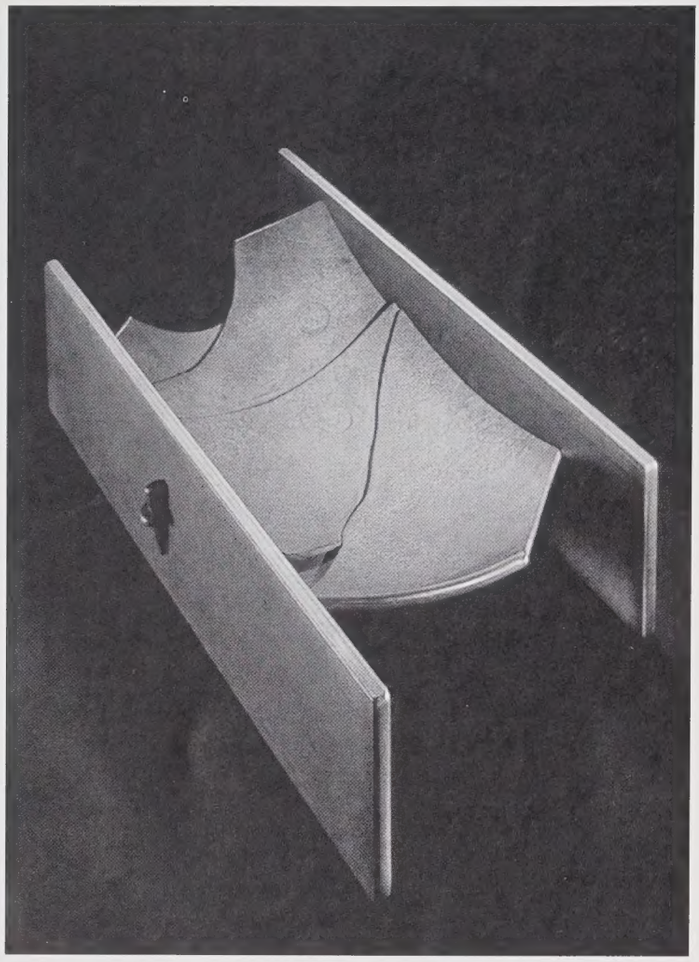
There is another point that troubles me. In this rather small state, in a somewhat obscure field, there is a veritable minefield of creative genius encompassing, in all, close to 40 people. Even such a limited subject involving so few individuals presents enormous challenges, much research, and dedicated work on the part of the presenters. All of that occurred with this fine show. However, for whatever reasons, from whatever quarter, and however defensible, *the record is incomplete*. A chance of a lifetime, i.e. *official* recognition, documentation, and affirmation for about ten artists' life work, was lost and so the record remains incomplete. The most obvious work omitted was that of Condon Kuhl. This gentle man, now in Maine, is doing the best work of his long and distinguished career. Kuhl's leadership, when he was in central Iowa along with two other professors, is acknowledged in the catalogue as the foundation for this show. Without the visual presence of his work the exhibition suffers and this survey is ill-served. No rules or guidelines are so hallowed that they need be allowed to overrule the obvious.

There is another group of fine artisans who have no advocate and it consists of those who work in the field, yet may not be university trained. The university is a beginning only, as these others silently, yet eloquently, remind those of us who have benefited from their expertise. Even a quick survey of my own acquaintances reveals the omission of the following people, whose achievements are definitely worthy of this forum.

These artists belong on the roster of contemporary Iowa metalsmiths: John Christensen, Darla Ellickson, Michael Gilger, Matt Powell, Jim Russell; and teachers in Iowa for only a short time, with major impact, nonetheless: Helen Shirk and Randy Long.

The legacy to Iowa of this group of artisans does exist. My hope is that people might someday recognize that in diminishing one, we all stay small. Any observer is competent, fully able to draw his/her own conclusions about a subject if given the whole picture, and the big picture is inclusive.

Tom Joyce
Wedged Fault Bowl
forged mild steel
6 x 26 x 11¾"
Photograph by Nick Merrick



Metal Sculpture

The Wetsman Collection
Birmingham, Michigan
November 22 – January 18, 1997

by Susan Holt

Metal is inherently a site of transformation, but what surprises one about this stylistically diverse show is that each artist foregrounds a change of state. Through reuse and reconfiguration of the utilitarian, the artists included reflect a measure of how the space between quotidian infrastructure and sculpture might be traversed.

Boris Bally's, by now familiar, DPW and DOT collection of bowls, trays, furniture, and pins filled the space with their colorful urban sensibility. All of these items are cut and fabricated from salvaged aluminum signage. Stylish, smartly vulgar, and meticulously crafted the work touches on numerous timely messages. Yet, for all their wit and edge, the individual pieces seldom out pace their graphic origins.

However Bally's large wall mounted installation, *Construction 9,* successfully integrates the crowd of ideas proposed by earlier work. In the nine bowls, coherence of shape, size, finish, and especially color – an unexpectedly luminous orange – allows the often flickering, sometimes boldly declarative text to function both as architecture and poetry. The surface is at once integrated and interrogated as letters escape their signs in the rims' pierced openings and reflective orange lights in the viewer's passing gaze. The sum is a perpetually *under construction* story – ours as well as the artist's.

Much less clamorous but no less articulate are Tom Joyce's bowls and wall pieces. Joyce, whose architectural ironwork is justifiably acclaimed, is equally adept at this more intimate scale. Pieced from the steel scrap remaining from large works, forged, welded, or folded and compressed, the bowls condense the energy of scale into objects of domestic intent. The technical mastery evidenced here has achieved something beyond virtuosic display and becomes/induces a meditation on fluidity and strength. All these pieces retain the marks of their making, the natural surface of the metal as it comes from the forge. Process is deceptively transparent. You would not necessarily recognize that the *Rolled Bowl,* started as a spiral wrap or that the folds of *Fibonacci Bowl* were calculated mathematically, but these initial strategies quietly inform the outcome. The minimally elegant *Rectangular and Inlaid Bowls,* most a monastic steel gray, are sensuously structured by the seams of their combined fragments. Filling and articulating more space than their size would suggest, these bowls are one of those rare instances where sculpture and utility begin to intersect.

David Secrest's work speaks more of absences; an empty *Cradleboard, a Reliquary* still awaiting its cherished souvenir. Constructed of sandcast bronze and forged iron, these have a disquieting muteness despite multiple cultural and material references. More insistent, perhaps, are the two *Wedged Dovetail Seats* which weld into a single massive package of African stools, the *seat* of a blacksmith's working, and antiquated upholstery fabrics. This is a potentially giddy mix and alchemy of citation and technique, but one bonded together with reductive form.

While these artists are not postulating fundamentally new questions, they are certainly enriching the store of answers to some of the timeless ones. They make quiet clear work that expands discourse as surely as rhetoric.

Susan Holt is a artist and metalsmith living and working in Ann Arbor and Detroit, Michigan.

Monolithic Encounter #11
bronze, copper, patina
51 x 48 x 16"

A Poet of Dream Worlds: Exploring New Territories in Metal

New Works by Komelia Hongja Okim

Zenith Gallery
Washington, DC.
September 12 – October 13, 1996

by Paulette Myers

Metalwork by nationally known artist Komelia Hongja Okim was exhibited at the Zenith Gallery in Washington, DC., September 12 through October 13, 1996. The exhibition consisted of 17 wall and pedestaled sculptures, furniture of glass-covered tables, as well as 16 works in jewelry, predominately brooches. As in previous exhibitions, Okim's work exemplified a dynamic, evolutionary state of mind. This exhibition offered new and progressive developments in both content and technique. In content she has not only expanded upon aspects of her theme of the figure in architectural landscapes, but for the first time the human figure and the environment have become independent of each other. In terms of process, welding and bronze foundry casting have also become necessary elements for the execution of enlarged and more massive metal structures.

In both her jewelry and sculpture, Okim symphonically orchestrates her passion for life as a Korean/American. She gains her inspiration from both cultures. Seoul, Korea known as "the land of the morning calm" instills its power of tranquillity and exuberance through its surrounding mountains, rivers, countryside, and its metropolitan and industrialized city, with its people and culture. This rich heritage coupled with the similarities and differences found in the United States and worldwide continue to offer the dream worlds of inspiration for Okim.

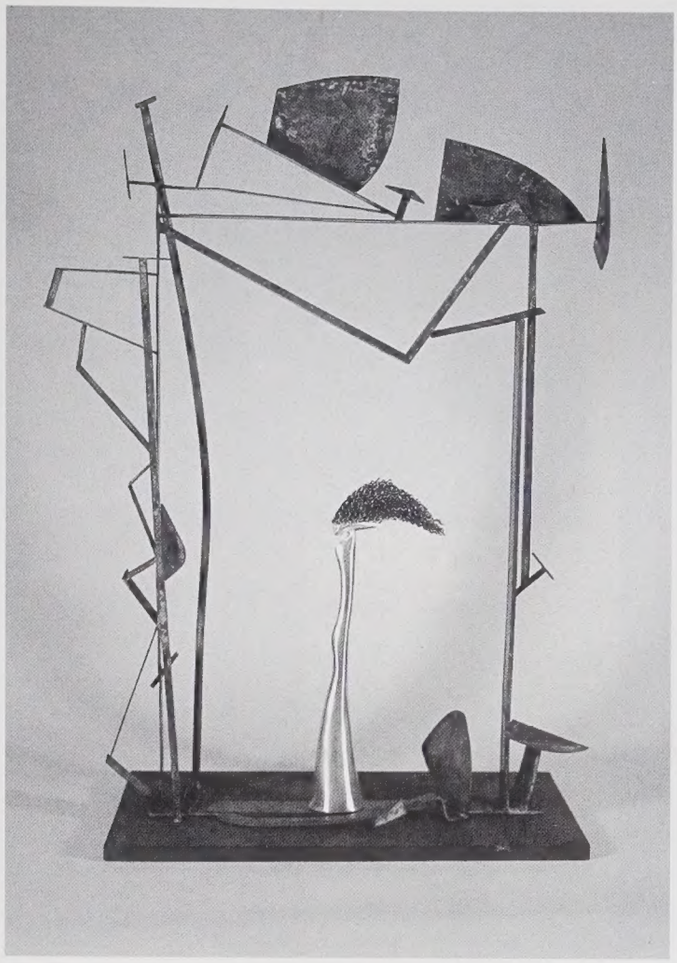
This extremely prolific artist continues to explore elegant, elongated figures in abstracted, architectural-type landscapes. The architectural aspects of the landscape refer to either, an architectonic abstraction of nature often at the periphery of the metal forms such as in her brooch entitled *Evening Outing* and the sculpture entitled *Away from the City's Dust and Noise, No. 11*; or the artist includes references to bridges, buildings, or architectural entrances or openings, as seen in her sculpture *Whispering Through the Window*.

But a difference in landscape format is seen in both her sculpture and jewelry. The wall sculpture entitled *Under the Clouds No. II* diverges from Okim's characteristic geometric enclosures of square and rectangle to a softened organic enclosure, referencing sky and clouds with arcing lines. These lines connect in space in an overall arched effect creating the stage for the figure within. The abstracted references to trees, pathways, and rocks are stylized and simplified in the landscape setting. In her brooch entitled *City and I, No. 1*, there is a similar format change in that a half sphere becomes the curved boat or earth-like platform out of which both the city and the figure rise.

In her sculptural metal another major change occurs. The pedestaled sculpture *Encounter at the Bridge* exhibits an industrial power and strength due to an increase in scale, the greater mass of the structural form, and its dynamic simplification by the elimination of internal fluid lines which normally activate a lyrical negative space. But the colors and texture of the form retain a reference to nature with an encrusted greenish-brown patina, setting the stage for a more organic place of encounter.

RIGHT
Whispering Through the Window
copper, brass, silver, patina
42 x 38 x 21"

FAR RIGHT
Tranquillity
cast bronze, copper, patina
35 x 14 x 7", edition 1/7



In these narrative settings, Okim makes the human figure both male and female. She emphasizes and gives importance to them in two ways. The first method uses the effects of the color and texture in the type of metal. Most often the figures are created of a more precious metal, either highly polished sterling silver or 24k leaf fragments over patination. In the second method contrast is achieved through a more organic rather than geometric form. It should be noted that at this sculptural scale, the sleek, elegant figures are often created through three-dimensional hollow forming techniques.

But in this exhibition, Okim presented four other sculptures, recent works, which show the greatest and most significant change of all. This change is found in the separation of the figure from the architectural/landscape setting, and the architectural landscape becoming figure free.

Okim's latest figure-free sculptures are entitled *Monolithic Encounter No. I* and *Monolithic Encounter No. II*. With their two feet pedestals these sculptures tower seven feet from the ground. These monolithic forms represent an entrance or archway. Since no figure is present in these sculptures, the title *Monolithic Encounter* must refer to the viewer as the participant, the one who will encounter, the one who will enter through the towering passageways.

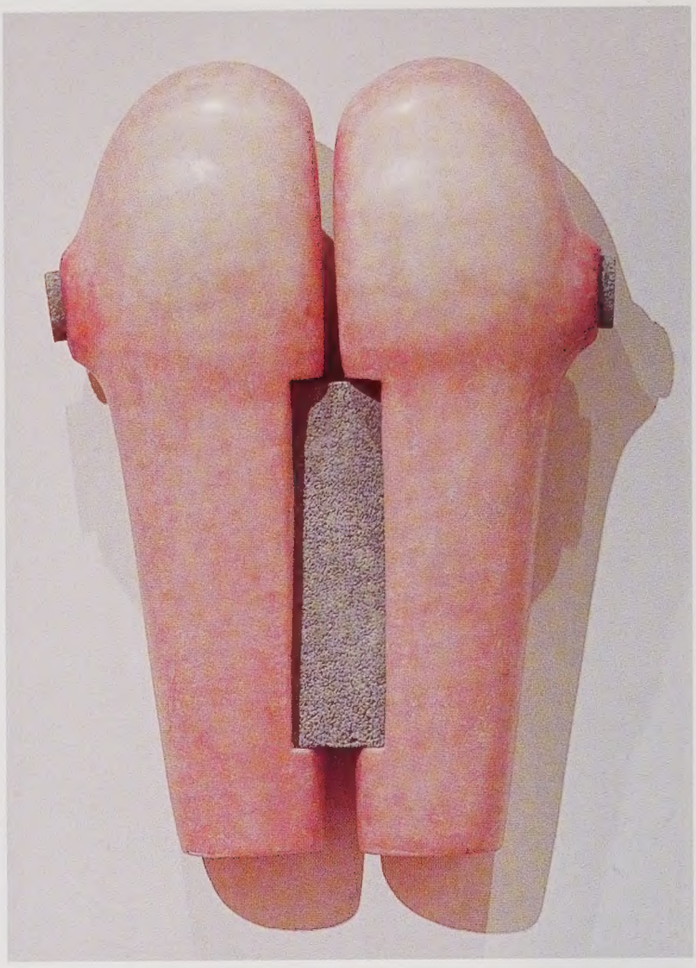
Made of massive beams of copper and bronze and patinated to green-blue with textures of rough encrustation, these sculptural forms have an ancient and indestructible power. The beams jut out and over one's head in a forceful diagonal thrust. No longer are viewers simply observers, they are actors within the scene.

Figures have stood alone in Okim's previous functional hollowware, but in nonfunctional form, figures have remained in their landscape settings. In *Tranquillity* and *Solitude* there is no longer a protective environment; these pieces do not offer a moment in time, an event, an encounter for the viewer to observe. Okim presents a higher level of existence, a state of mind, a state of being. These sculptural figures exemplify this state. In these works, time is infinite, not specific. The state is universal and spiritual.

The power of these works is achieved by an increase in scale, two to three times larger in height and volume than previously presented. The patinas and textures of these foundry-cast, solid bronze figures are less intense. Stately golds and magentas mix with pale browns in the subtle surface colors. The fluid gestural figures stand above the viewer on their pedestals, requiring the observer to play a less dominant and more subservient role. These sculptures emphasize and instill a retrospective view of life and its meaning. They project a stately and non-earthly existence, seemingly untouchable, invulnerable, and uncompromising. Could these sculptures represent a perfect world to the artist? Could they be self-portraits? Or do they represent a more universal world, a dream-world, or a desire for the perfect state of being? The future may define the meaning and intent as Komelia Hongja Okim continues with the greatest fervor, to create her metal sculptures, jewelry, and furniture.

Paulette Myers is a metalsmith who lives in Collinsville, Illinois.

Untitled, 1994
encaustic wood, photographs
108 x 28 x 24"



RIGHT
Untitled, 1994
encaustic core matrix, concrete
36 x 26 x 9"

Lin Stanionis — Vestiges: Visible Traces

Women & Their Work Gallery
Austin, Texas
May 16 – June 15, 1996

by Madeline Irvine

Loaded with body references and sexual content, the beautifully crafted, abstract wall and floor sculptures by Lin Stanionis in *Vestiges: Visible Traces* readily connect to the current exploration of the fragility and limitations of the body, the container for the spirit. Yet the artist's refusal to pigeonhole that experience made for a memorable, if disquieting exhibition.

Stanionis's sculptures have a quiet power, able to seduce and repel, attract and repulse. Loaded with ambiguous forms and multiple references, her mutant forms operate as a blank screen, against which we project shadows lurking in the recesses of our minds and bodies.

The sculptures have a tactile, edgy excitement, mixing the risk of the unknown with a liminal state, the edge of comprehension, that is brought down to earth by evidence of vulnerability and trauma. One gradually becomes aware of the often bruised interiors, covered with delicate, burnished wax skins.

It is in ambiguity that Stanionis engages the viewer. When the artist becomes explicit, allowing us to name a body part such as the penis, for example, the work becomes too obvious, and loses its ability to soar.

The sculptures suggest organic structures. Not merely male or female, some have insect-like aspects, while others fuse the organic with the architectonic, melding sarcophagi with human form.

The beauty of the artist's classic forms and smooth, buttery surfaces draw one to them, only to expose illness, evidence of trauma, operations, and unexpected growth patterns under the translucent, encaustic cover. As much as the work is about invasion or corruption, it is also about survival, overcoming, and healing.

Through a white topskin, we see a purple bruise under the surface of a ridged doughnut or bagel circle with a square of smooth concrete in the center. Reminiscent of a child's toy in which you can only fit a round peg in a round hole, or a square peg in a square hole, things have gone awry: a square peg has been forced in a round hole. But like a tree growing around a metal sign pole, the living element is subsuming the intrusion. These simpler forms act as sketches, an opening up or discovery of thematic materials.

Stanionis's pod forms are her most elegant and enigmatic. One is a slightly mottled, deep reddish purple in the shape of an elongated torso. From the neck and shoulders it tapers like a mummy. Four ridges cross the front of the sculpture, alluding to lips or arms across the chest. An incision breaks the skin from the neck down, piercing the ridges. The slit is clinical in its precision, and is partially healed or closed. A tiny opening allows entry between exterior and interior, heightening the vulnerability and element of risk and danger.

Trauma becomes torture in one of the forms. Two hip or buttock shapes with cut-off legs, or abstract chest and arm silhouettes, are joined by a concrete block. At each side, concrete plugs force their way out of red, sore, mouth-like holes. Though the body is overcoming the intrusion, growing over it, the pain is evident.

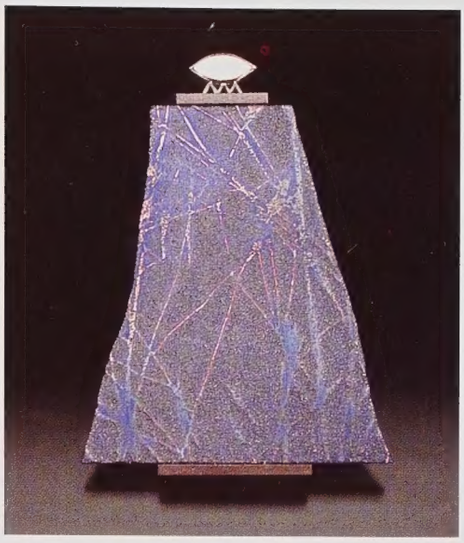
Madeline Irvine is a critic who lives in Austin, Texas.

LEFT TO RIGHT

Brooch
enamel and 24k on etched copper,
sterling silver, turquoise, 3⅝ x ⅝"

Brooch
enamel on etched copper, 18k,
sterling silver, blue agate, 2½ x 1⅞"

Brooch
enamel and 24k on etched copper,
18k, sterling silver, tiger eye, 4 x ¾"



Rebekah Laskin

Aaron Faber Gallery
New York, New York
December 5, 1996 – January 4, 1997

by Marjorie Simon

A kind of grace hovers over the latest book by Hermann Jünger, a paean to *making*, and a call to arms to hold fast to the meaning in making and even to acknowledge "...making as the basis for human existence, transcending separating barriers...." Together the drawings, photographs, and essays conspire to remind us that without the meaning imbued by the intrinsic value of handwork and a real body to bear them, our creations are as soulless as computer-generated designs.

Although readers will feast on images of assertive chunks of garnet and lapis lazuli elbowing for space on squares of gold, they should heed the text as well. With references ranging from the historic (Theophilus) to the literary (B. Traven, *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*), the essays devolve around levels of meaning in the concept of *work*. Not overlooked is the crucible of the German experience, from Goethe to Stefan Zweig, to the Nazi perversion of the work ethic, and Jünger's moving descriptions of his artistic coming-of-age in the literal rubble of post-war Germany. Under the guidance of his teacher and mentor Franz Rickert at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich, Jünger found encouragement for his suspicions that jewelry-making could be more than the technique so highly valued in Europe since the Renaissance.

Twenty-five pages of text and black and white photos precede the first color plate, a muted grey and black brooch, that comes as a fat circle after a forest of verticals in close-ups of the tools of our trade: files, pencils, paint brushes, nails, and saw blades. Drawings, watercolor wash sketches, and renderings, the lively chaos of sketchbook pages familiar to readers of Jünger's earlier catalogues alternate with lush actual-sized photographs, one or two images per page.

The jewelry pictured was made after 1989 and reveals the aesthetic concerns – "simple forms, in sequence and alignment, or the rich, detailed concentration within a small format" – that have characterized Jünger's work for over 30 years. His own essay highlights his intellectual underpinnings while pointing up the limitations of the book format itself, that is, "Jewellery only comes to life when worn, makes its impact as the body moves...." As proof, a couple of fluid necklaces shown on models provide an elegant counterpoint to the intimate brooches. Jünger's comments, written in his own calligraphic hand, thankfully include the story behind a pair of enameled brooches that began with his granddaughter playing in his studio.

At the end of his life, Sigmund Freud was asked what he thought a normal person ought to be able to do well. "*Lieben und arbeiten*" (to love and to work) is said to have been his terse reply. From the opening images of familiar tools to the tender closing shots of Jünger folded into a chair reading with his grandchild, Jünger at work, and closing with an exuberant back-lit shot of the artist's wife Jo, this *more-than-catalogue* documents an artist's love affair with process and indeed, a celebration of head, heart, and hands.

Uber des Schmuck und das Machen is available in the United States through Jewelerswerk Galerie, Washington, DC.

Marjorie Simon is a metalsmith and frequent contributor to this magazine. She resides in Highland Park, New Jersey.

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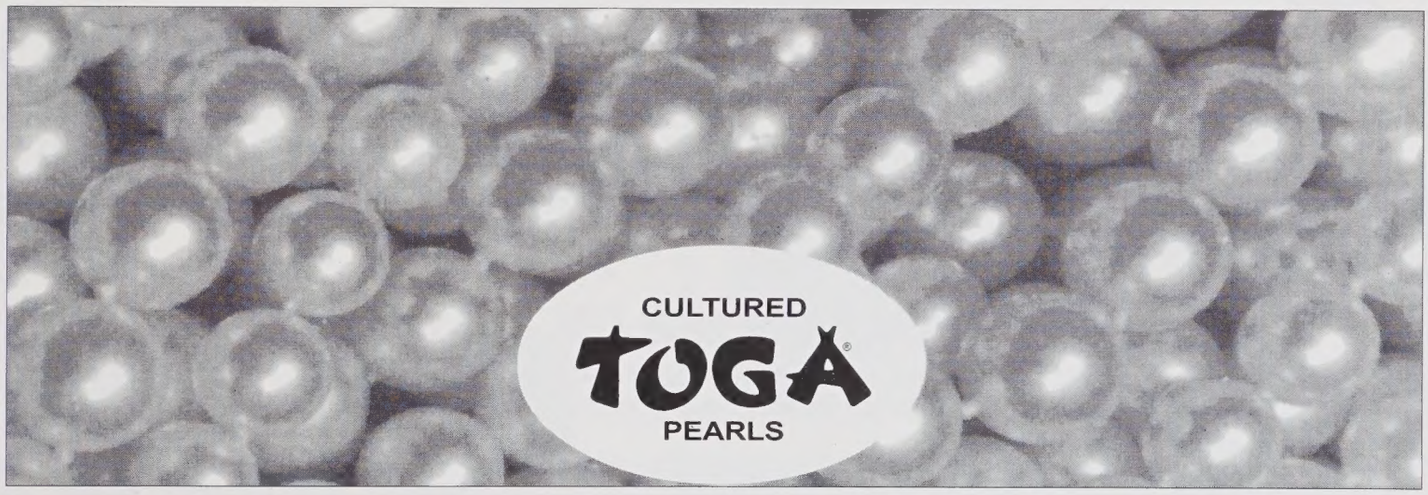

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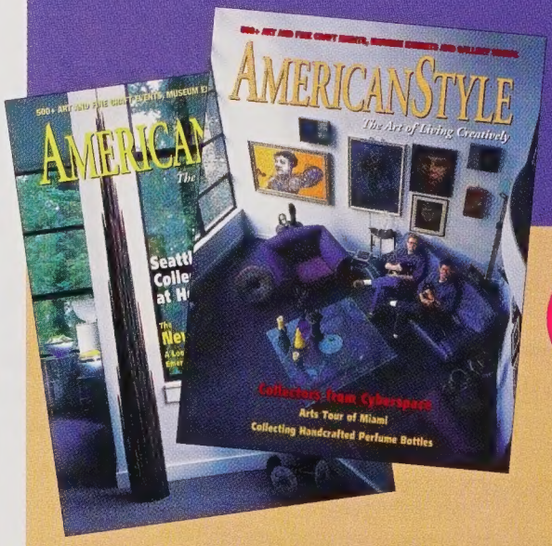

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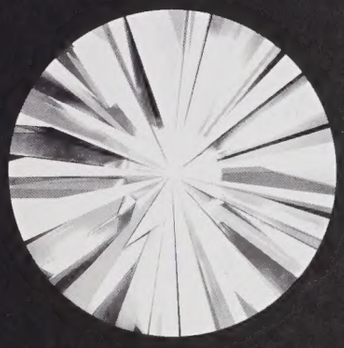

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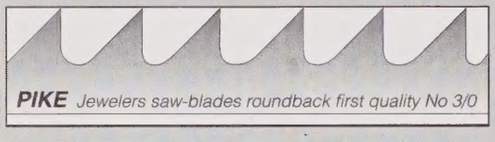

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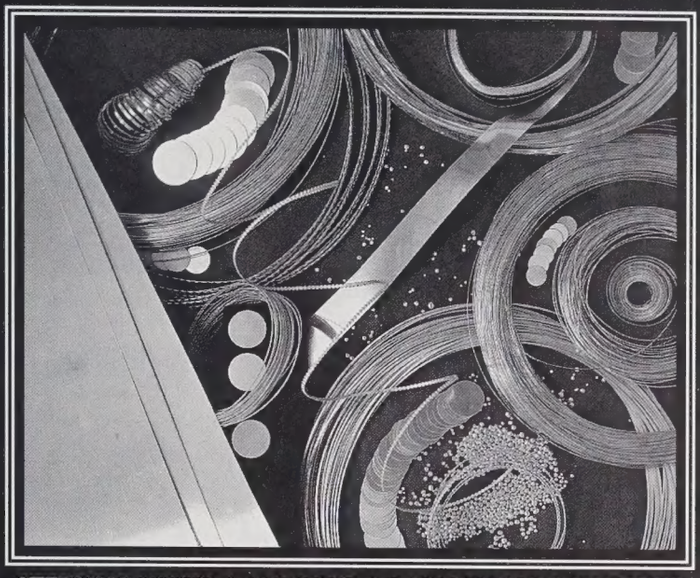

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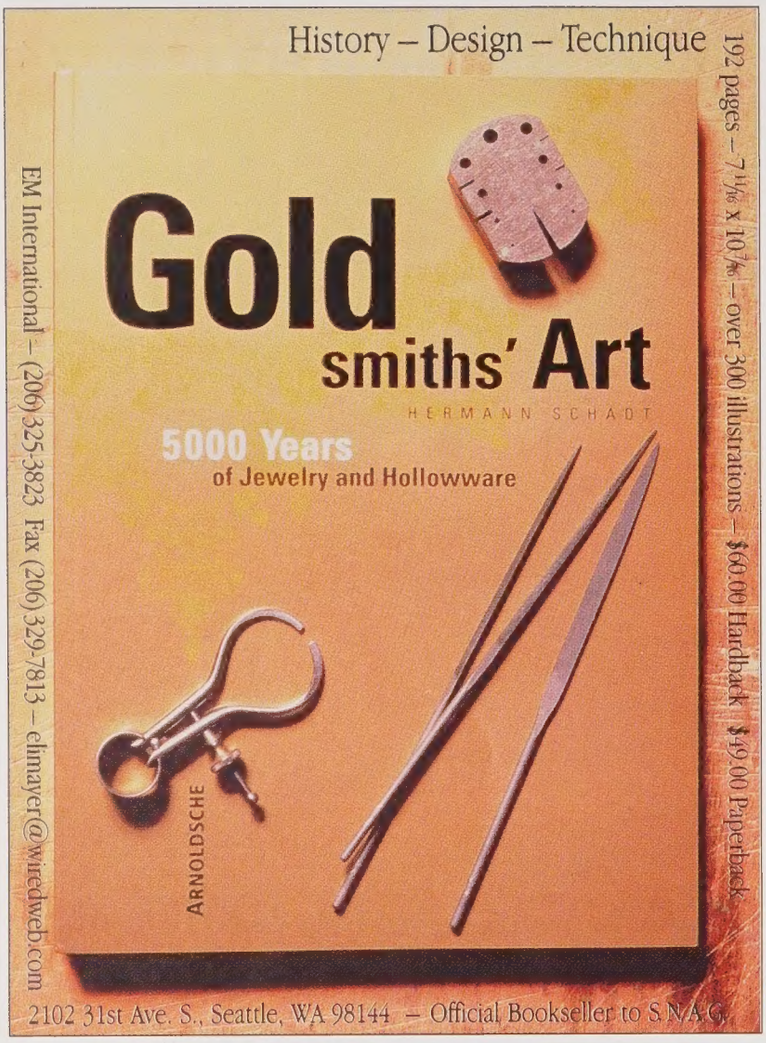

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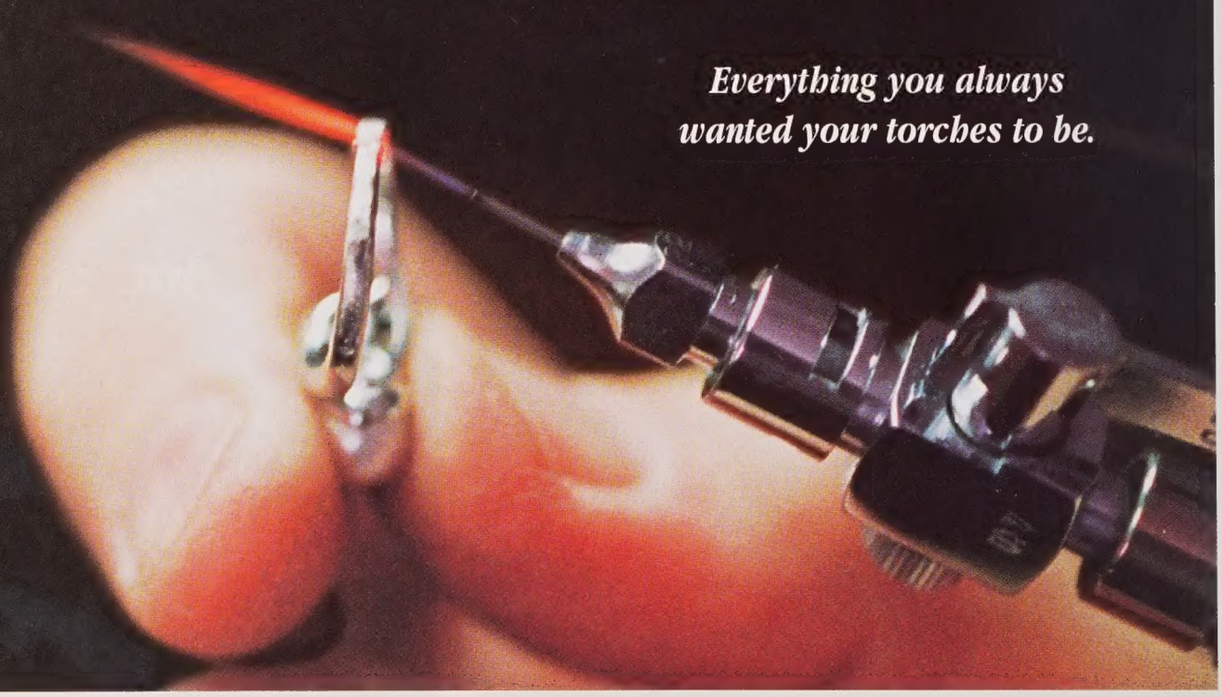

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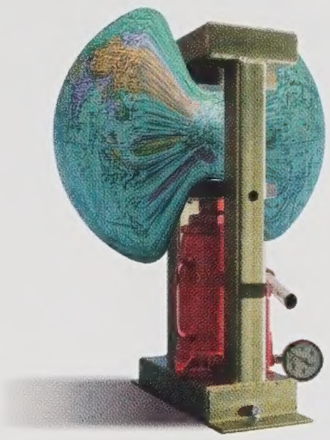

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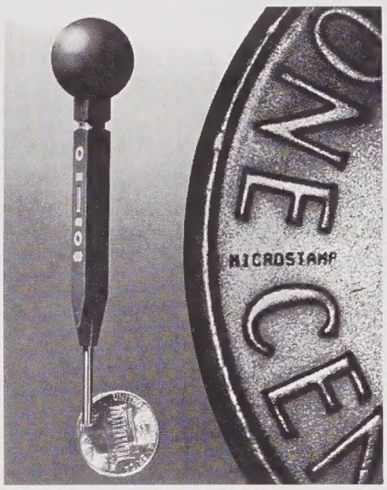

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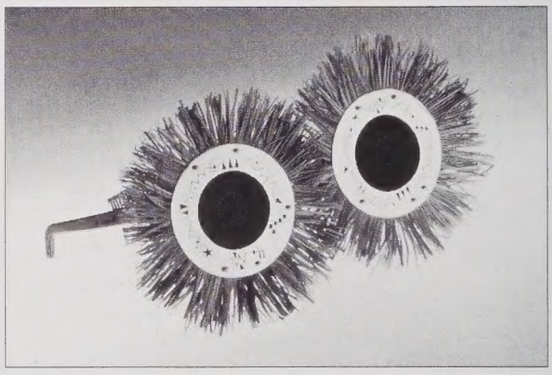

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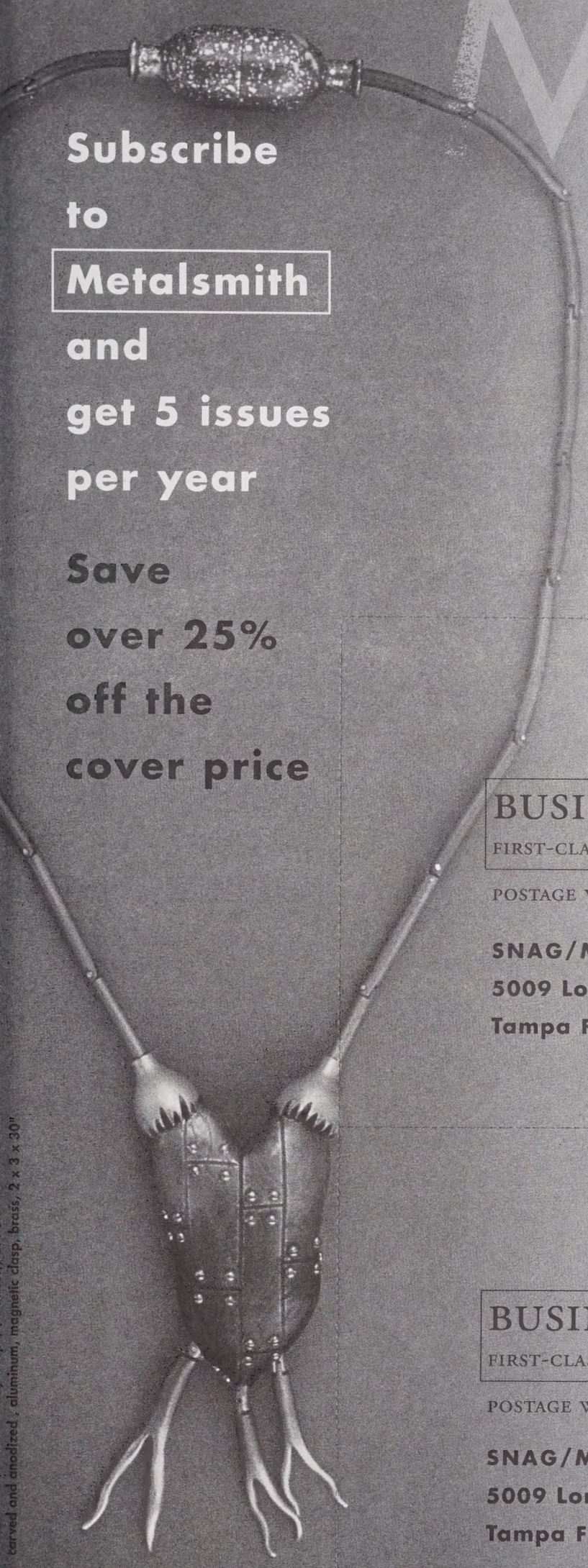

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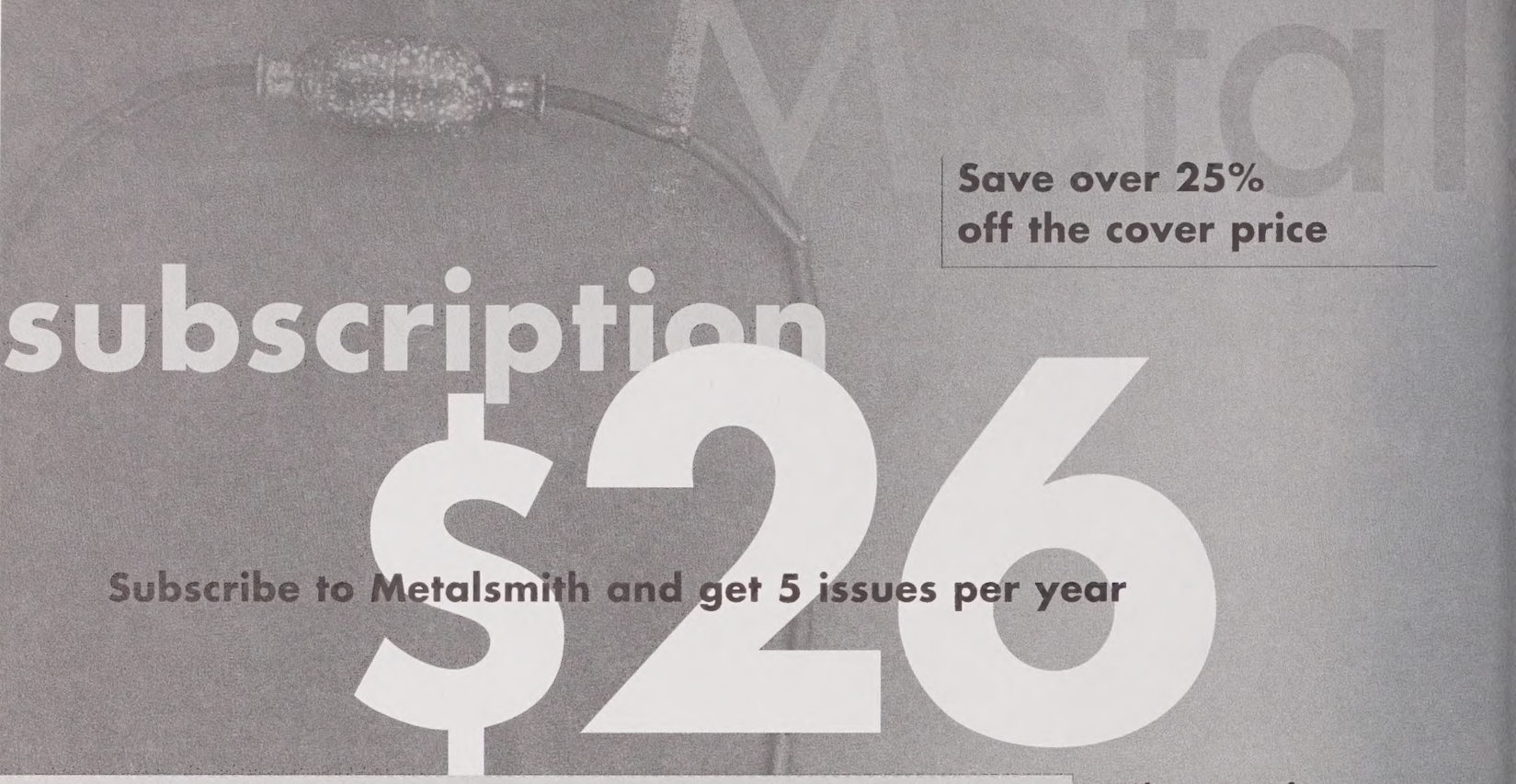

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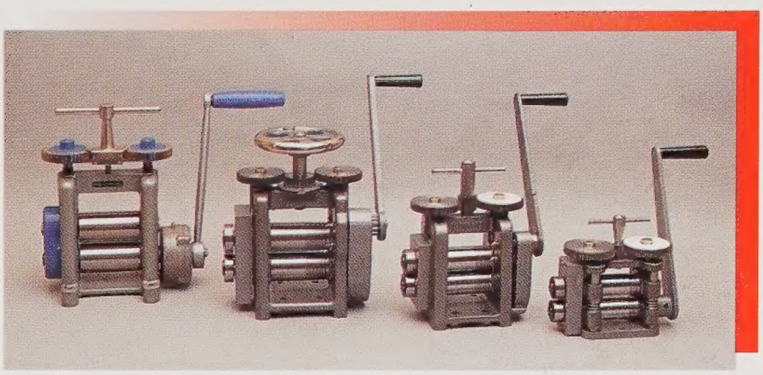

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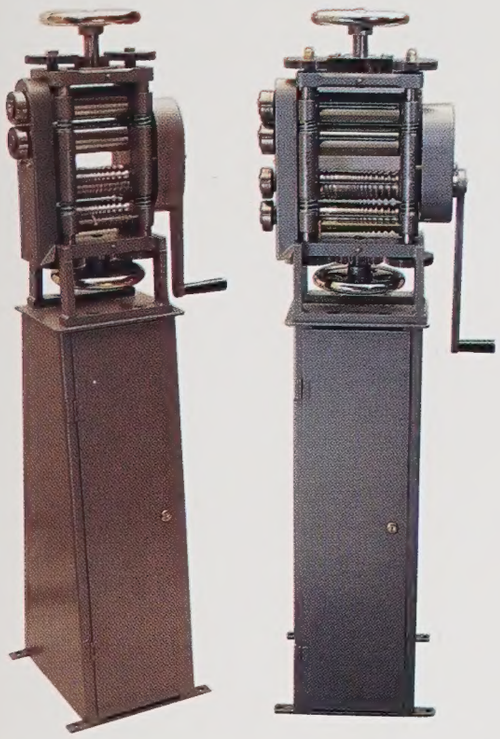

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120mm
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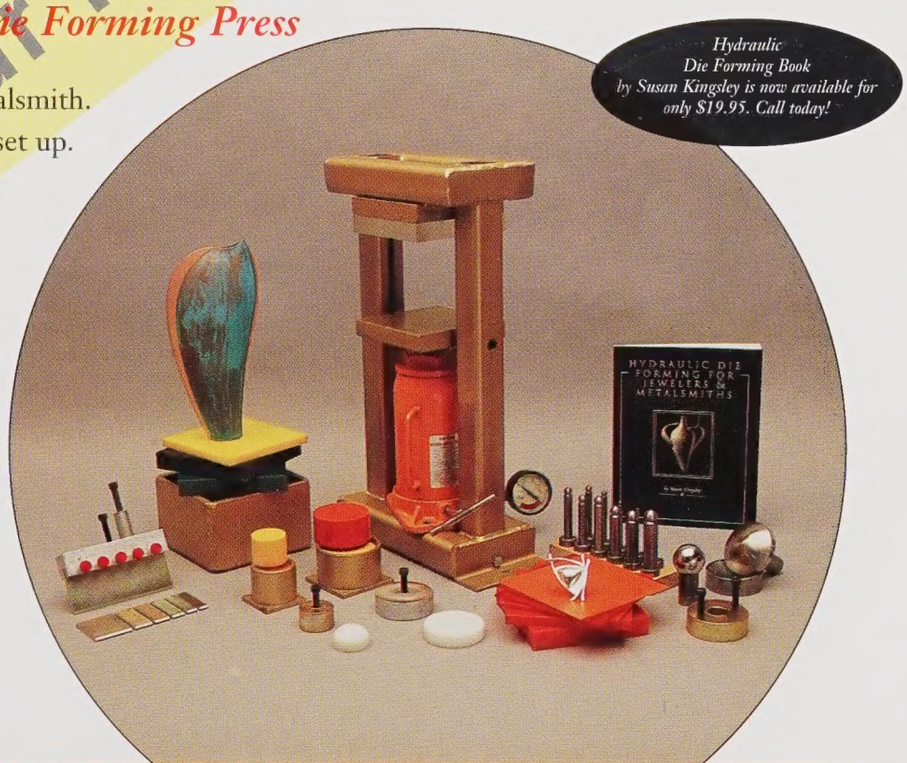

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